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A
DEFENCE
OF
THE BIBLE;

IN REPLY TO
THOMAS PAINE'S
AGE OF REASON:

COMPILED FROM
THE ANSWERS TO THAT BOOK.

BY A LAYMAN.

"With a mind weary of conjecture, fatigued by doubt, sick of disputation, eager for knowledge, anxious for certainty, and unable to attain it by the best use of my reason in matters of the utmost importance, I have long ago turned my thoughts to an impartial examination of the proofs on which REVEALED RELIGION is grounded, and I am convinced of its TRUTH. This examination is a subject within the reach of human capacity; you have come to one conclusion respecting it, I have come to another; both of us cannot be right; may God forgive him that is in an error!"

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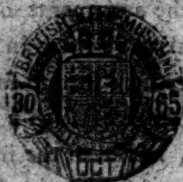


IT has been justly remarked, that truth has gained more than it has lost, by the attacks of deists upon revelation; as to them we owe the masterly defences which have appeared in vindication of it, in antient as well as modern times. From Mr. Faine's work, therefore, there is little to fear, respecting its effects on the faith of intelligent christians; but "as the celebrity of his former writings, among a numerous class of readers, will doubtless introduce his theological notions to many who perhaps never read or thought much about religion; to them it may be necessary to drop one caution—not to let their admiration of his abilities in the one subject, warp their judgment on the other. A man may be an adept in one science, who in others is very deficient."

To select, impartially, the arguments of the principal authors who have replied to Mr. P.—to arrange them in as plain and regular a manner as possible—and to bring them into so small a compass, that the poor man who wishes for the assistance of such a work, may, at a trifling expence, be able to procure it, has been the intention of the compiler; if his endeavours have been successful, the present pamphlet, he hopes, will prove not merely an answer to Mr. P., but an antidote against the Infidelity which is now so prevalent.

As some persons, instead of paying due attention to the subject, might place a reliance on the assertions of their favorite authors, and others object to the arguments of men whom they disapprove, the names of those who have answered Mr. P.'s book, and from whose works the following pages are compiled, have been omitted. Care also has been taken not to meddle with politics; nor to plead the cause of one sect or party of christians against the others. Matters of far greater moment claim precedence in the minds of all true believers. To their attention the compiler wishes to recommend the following extract, from one of the answers to "The Age of Reason;" not doubting but it will be received, with approbation, by ~~those~~ those who admire the Gospel of Jesus.

"The time, perhaps, is fast approaching, when all other distinctions will be lost in this; when men will be divided into those who believe in and fear God, who believe in and obey christianity, and those who are not of this description. In comparison with this distinction, all other differences among men are trifles light as air. Let us regard every man who adopts this belief, as a brother. As a brother, indeed, let us regard every individual of the human race, and let us endeavour, with all our might, to make every one a brother by religion, as well as by nature. Let us contend, most earnestly contend, not for the christianity of any particular national establishment, not for the christianity of any particular sect or party, but for the christianity of the New Testament. Let us contend, most earnestly contend, for *the faith once delivered to the saints*. Let the only weapons which we make use of in this contest be reason and argument, and, what is of still more commanding influence, a life regulated by the precepts and example of Christ. Let us be not merely speculative, but practical christians. Christianity is a system not so much of speculation, as of practice. Let us shew to all the world, by the purity of our hearts and the active usefulness of our lives, that *we have been with Jesus, and have learned of him*. Let us shew, by every part of our conduct in our intercourse with mankind, that we are the true followers of that master, whose life was virtue in human form—the consistent disciples of that teacher, whose first, last lesson to the world was love."



DEFENCE OF THE BIBLE.

A SKETCH OF *THE EVIDENCES OF CHRISTIANITY.*

THAT there was such a person as Jesus Christ—that he was born in Judea in the time of Augustus—that he gathered disciples—taught the multitude—performed many wonderful works, and at last suffered death through the malice of the Jews—are facts better attested than the most notorious actions of the heroes and orators of antient Greece and Rome. For,

1st. We have the same authority for these as for those; namely, that of Tacitus, Suetonius, Pliny the younger, and other heathen historians of those times.

2d. We have the circumstantial narratives of the Evangelical historians, most of whom were eye-witnesses of the facts they relate, and (with a thousand others) confirmed this testimony with their blood. These writings also may be proved not only to have been written, but also dispersed, and read in public assemblies of christians, during the very age in which these events happened.

3d. The principal facts (the resurrection excepted) were never denied by the early enemies of christianity, among either Jews or Heathens. It is true they attributed them to wrong causes, and endeavoured to evade the inferences naturally deducible from them—with what success we shall have occasion to observe.

4th. The very being of christianity, and the existence of its institutions, as in particular, the christian sabbath and sacraments, are incontestable monuments of the facts to which they refer. These hints may suffice to shew the credibility of the leading facts on which christianity is founded.

The credibility of the facts will, in a great measure, establish the authority of the writers. For if the facts which they assert upon their own knowledge, are in themselves credible, it only remains to shew that they were persons of common sense, and sincere in their testimony, to establish it so far as is necessary to our present purpose.

For the former we may appeal to the writings themselves; for assuredly, no man who does not with his own capacity to be called

in question, will venture to deny them a sufficient degree of understanding to relate the things of which they were both eye and ear witnesses. And for their sincerity we may appeal to the simplicity, harmony, and candour of their narrations, to the disinterestedness of their conduct, the unwearied assiduity of their labours, and their constant and severe sufferings in the cause of their divine master. And indeed it is utterly inconceivable that such a number of men should conspire in an imposture, not only at the expense of every thing dear in this life, and in the immediate prospect of death itself; but in the apprehension of being treated as impostors by posterity, and answering for their impositions in a future world.

Having thus far established the credibility of the authors of the New Testament, we proceed to inquire into their account of the divine character and mission of Jesus Christ, which will lead us at the same time to review some of the grand evidences on which christianity is founded.

Their professed design then, is, to shew that Jesus Christ was the Messiah, the Son of God, and the Saviour of Mankind; that he came into the world in consequence of a divine mission, and that he fulfilled that mission in his life, doctrine, sufferings, death, and resurrection.

I. In order to demonstrate this, they represent him as FORETOLD by the Hebrew PROPHETS, and as exactly answering all their sublime predictions, both in his life and death. This is an extensive subject; we can only observe a few particulars.—They pointed out the *place* of his BIRTH, namely Bethlehem, an obscure village, but to be made illustrious by this event*; and restricted the *time* of it during the existence of the second temple, and within a period which by every reasonable mode of calculation must have expired at its destruction†.—His tribe and family are exactly marked‡; his conception of a virgin§, and the circumstance of his being preceded by a forerunner¶ (namely, John the Baptist) are foretold with equal plainness.—The very manner of his preaching, that it should be meek and affectionate; the nature of his doctrine, that it should be full of divine wisdom and righteousness, and severe only to the hypocritical and impenitent; the miracles with which his doctrine should be confirmed, the healing the diseased, recovering the blind and deaf, and other works of kindness and benevolence||.—The purity of his life; and, above all, the nature, degree, variety of his sufferings, his accursed death, and glorious resurrection** are described by the prophets, in terms little less particular and exact than were used by the evangelical writers, after the actual accomplishment of the events themselves.

It

* Micah v. 2 compared with Matt. ii. 1—6.

† Gen. xlix. 10. Haggai ii. 7. Dan ix. 24—27. ‡ Jer. xxiii. 5, 6.

§ Isaiah vii. 14. ¶ Isa. xl. 3. || Isa. xlii. 1—8. ** Isa. lii. 13—15. liii.



It is further observable, that these very prophecies were, most of them applied to the expected Messiah by Jewish doctors who preceded the time of his appearance; to these prophecies Jesus himself appealed; and from them his apostles constantly reasoned with the Jews; and by this preaching, accompanied by the promised effusions of the Spirit, thousands were convinced and converted, and became the disciples to and martyrs of a crucified Messiah.

To give all conceivable strength to this evidence, and cut off the only pretence that future adversaries could raise, namely, That these predictions were forged subsequent to the events, the providence of God had so ordered it, that they were not only translated into Chaldea, but into Greek; whence many particulars became known to the Gentile philosophers, were interwoven with the sibyline oracles, and even incorporated into the sublime numbers of Virgil; and all this before the New Testament was written. Thus a general expectation was formed at this time of a great deliverer, and the eyes of all men directed to look for his appearance.

"O, son of mighty Jove! from heaven appear;

"Come to thine honors—lo, the time draws near!

"The barren hills proclaim the Deity:

"A God! a God! the vocal rocks reply*."

II. Let us review the Redeemer's MORAL CHARACTER. Take a summary of it in the language of the elegant but sceptical *Rosseau*†.

I will confess to you that the majesty of the scriptures strikes me with admiration, as the purity of the gospel hath its influence on my heart. Peruse the works of our philosophers with all their pomp of diction: how mean, how contemptible are they, compared with the scripture! Is it possible that a book, at once so simple and sublime, should be merely the work of man? Is it possible that the sacred personage, whose history it contains, should be himself a mere man? Do we find that he assumed the tone of an enthusiast, or ambitious sectary? What sweetness, what purity in his manners! what an affecting gracefulness in his delivery! What sublimity in his maxims! What profound wisdom in his discourses! What presence of mind, what subtlety, what truth in his replies! How great the command over his passions! Where is the man, where the philosopher, who could so live and so die, without weakness, and without ostentation?—When *Plato* described his imaginary good man with all the shame of guilt, yet meriting the highest rewards of virtue, he describes exactly the character of Jesus Christ: the resemblance was so striking that all the [christian] fathers perceived it.

"What prepossession, what blindness must it be, to compare [Socrates] the son of Sophroniscus to [Jesus] the son of Mary! What

* Virgil's *Pollio*, compared with Mr. Pope's Messiah and judicious Notes.

† See his Letter to the Archbishop of Paris, Eng. Transl. Lond. 1763, 12mo. p. 63.

What an infinite disproportion is there between them? Soerates, dying without pains or ignominy, easily supported his character to the last; and if his death, however easy, had not crowned his life, it might have been doubted whether Soerates, with all his wisdom, was any thing more than a vain sophist. He invented, it is said, the theory of morals. Others however, had before put them in practice; he had only to say therefore what they had done, and to reduce their examples to precept.—But where could *Jesus* learn, among his competitors, that pure and sublime morality, of which he only hath given us both precept and example?—The death of Soerates, peaceably philosophizing with his friends, appears the most agreeable that could be wished for; that of *Jesus*, expiring in the midst of agonizing pains, abused, insulted, and accused by a whole nation, is the most horrible that could be feared. Soerates, in receiving the cup of poison, blessed the weeping executioner who administered it; but *Jesus*, in the midst of excruciating tortures, prayed for his merciless tormentors. Yes! if the life and death of Soerates were those of a Sage, the life and death of *Jesus* were those of a God. Shall we suppose the evangelic history a mere fiction? Indeed, my friend, it bears not the marks of fiction; on the contrary, the history of Soerates, which nobody presumes to doubt, is not so well attested as that of *Jesus* Christ. Such a supposition, in fact, only shifts the difficulty, without obviating it: it is more inconceivable that a number of persons should agree to write such an history, than that one only should furnish the subject of it. The Jewish authors were incapable of the diction, and strangers to the morality contained in the gospel, the marks of whose truth are so striking and inimitable, that the inventor would be a more astonishing character than the hero."

III. Let us consider the doctrines and precepts which form the substance of our Lord's DISCOURSES. We have already seen the concessions of a free-thinker. We may add, that both his doctrines and precepts had infinitely the advantage of the greatest sages in the schools of heathen philosophers, in several respects.

As to the *doctrines*, they were clear and express, not clothed in the ambiguity of the schools; they were worthy the nature of God, and important to mankind; instead of the shameful inventions of the poets, or the idle inquiries of the different philosophic sects; they point out the perfections of Deity—the miseries of our own state, and a way of acceptance with God here, and admission into the beatific vision hereafter.—They discover the nature and importance of the Redeemer's character, as mediator between God and man.—They are expressed with the greatest certainty, and confirmed with the fullest evidence: "God is gracious to sinners: I who came from the bosom of the Father declare it.—Man's heart is corrupted; I who reveal men's thoughts assert it.—There is a future state of rewards and punishments, I who now raise the dead, and am appointed to judge the world, aver it."

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The *morality* of the gospel has equally the advantage of the heathen ethics, particularly in two respects:—It is *universal*. Scarce a philosopher can be referred to, however severe in his manners, who had not some favorite vice to excuse or palliate; and scarce a sin so abominable, but it had some philosopher for its apologist. But what sin did Jesus tolerate?—Again, the *motives* he used were infinitely better adapted to the state of human nature, than those of Gentile moralists. They address our *fear*; God is just, and will punish impenitent sinners:—our *hope*; God is gracious, and will reward those that fear him:—our *gratitude*; God hath loved the world, and given his Son to save it:—our *interest*; he gives “an hundred fold in this life; and, in the world to come, life everlasting*.”

It may not be impertinent here to add, what Jesus taught in relation to the Old Testament economy, and its relation to the gospel dispensation. So far from speaking contemptuously of Moses and the prophets, as some deistical writers have pretended, he constantly refers to their writings as divine, and appeals to them as witnesses of his mission. “Search the scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life, and they are they which testify of me†.”

IV. The *miracles* of Jesus Christ command our attention; particularly, as they were wrought in confirmation of his doctrine and mission. “A *miracle* (says Dr. Clarke) is a work effected in a manner different from the common and regular course of Providence, by the interposition either of God himself, or some intelligent agent, superior to man‡.”

The miracles of Jesus were frequent, numerous, instantaneous, public, lasting, benevolent, and such as evidently required the interposition of Omnipotence. He healed the incurably sick; gave sight to those born blind; recovered demoniacs, lunatics, and epileptics: he raised the dead from their graves by his word; and performed many other works equally astonishing.

What said the Jews to this? “He casteth out devils by Beelzebub the prince of devils.” Is this rational? Is Satan a stranger to his own interests? Or would infernal spirits employ their powers in works of benevolence to men?—or to establish the brightest system of divinity, and the purest morals that ever were delivered?

What say the descendants of those Jews at this day? That Jesus found the ineffable name, JEHOVAH, in the temple, where it had been secreted for ages, and that by virtue of this charm he was able to perform all his miracles, and might have wrought yet more. Will common sense listen to such an idle tale?

What said the heathen philosophers? What said those grand enemies of primitive christianity, Celsus, Porphyry, and Julian? They pretended that Jesus Christ was a magician and a juggler—that Vespasian, Apollonius Tyanneus, and other prophets of their own

* Mark x. 39.

† John v. 39.

‡ Evidences of Natural and Revealed Religion, p. 219.

own, wrought the like. But what a crowd of unanswerable queries force themselves upon us?—What is Magic? If it be a diabolical art, devils would never have interested themselves to promote such a cause: if Magic be a cheat only, it never could have produced such effects. What were the heathen miracles? If false, how can they affect the truth of Christ's miracles? And if true, how can they be compared with them? For a prince like Vespasian to be flattered by his courtiers, or a philosopher like Apollonius, by his scholars, are neither new nor strange events. But shall their few, obscure, and suspicious wonders be compared with the miracles of Jesus Christ? There is very good reason to believe these stories were forged afterwards in prejudice of christianity.

But if miracles are to be attributed to magical arts and diabolical agency, it requires no great sagacity to decide which ought rather to be attributed thereto; those wrought in support of idolatry and superstition, or those wrought in express opposition to those arts and follies, and in support of the pure doctrines and morality of the gospel. Indeed the cause in support of which they are wrought, is a material circumstance in the test of miracles. The Jews were forbid to follow the prophet who enticed them to idolatry, whatever wonders he might perform*.

But there are two circumstances which set the miracles of Jesus far above competition even with those of Moses himself. The one is that they were wrought in exact fulfilment of ancient predictions, in which the very nature and circumstances of them (far different from those of the Jewish lawgiver) are pointed out to mark the character of the Messiah. The other still more extraordinary circumstance is, that the very persons who witnessed the miracles of Christ were able to do the same, or even greater, in his name, and actually did them to confirm their evidence; nay, still farther, they had delegated to them the authority of conferring the same miraculous powers on others, by imposition of hands; and this power was continued for many years to the utter confusion of their adversaries, and the destruction of Paganism. It was in vain to dispute with men, who could appeal to a surrounding throng of blind, diseased, and lame, who had been healed by a word spoken in the name of Jesus—with men who spoke all languages by inspiration, and had the wonderful ability of communicating these gifts to others.

V. These observations lead our attention to two particular facts on which christianity is, in a great measure, founded. I mean the RESURRECTION of CHRIST, and the DESCENT of the HOLY SPIRIT already hinted at.

The former of these is of indisputable importance: "If Christ be not raised our faith is vain." This is related by the very persons who used to converse with him during his public ministry, and who saw him repeatedly after he was raised from the dead, con-

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* Deut. xiii. 1—5.

versed with him, and received a commission from him to publish this fact, and proselyte all nations to these principles.—This is confirmed in some measure by the suspicious story of his enemies, that his disciples stole his body while the guard they had placed to watch the sepulchre slept*. But how dare the guard to sleep at the hazard of their lives? and if they did, how did they know who stole his body? and if they did not sleep, how was it possible that a few unarmed fishermen should force a military guard?

But the grand evidence of Christ's resurrection, is the DESCENT of the HOLY SPIRIT on the day of Pentecost. Our Lord had promised this previous to his death†, and the accomplishment of it was the strongest evidence possible, both of Christ's resurrection, and the divine origin of christianity.

VI. Once more, let us consider the EFFECTS and consequences of this effusion of the HOLY SPIRIT. They are principally three.

1. The rapid and universal spread of the gospel, even "before the destruction of Jerusalem (Bishop Newton observes‡) the gospel was not only preached in the lesser Asia, and Greece and Italy; the great theatres of action then in the world; but was likewise propagated as far northward as Ethiopia, as far eastward as Parthia and India, as far westward as Spain and Britain." And in the following century, notwithstanding all the opposition and persecution it met with, Tertullian§ boldly tells the Roman government—"We are but of yesterday, and by to-day are grown up, and overspread your empire; your cities, your islands, your forts, towns, assemblies, and your very camps, wards, companies, palace, senate, forum, all swarm with christians. Your temples indeed we leave to yourselves, and they are the only places you can name without christians."

2. It is to be observed, that christianity not only proselyted men to the belief and outward profession of christianity, but had a visible and moral effect on their lives and conduct. Never was any other cause supported with such irresistible evidence. Wherever it came it was received by multitudes, at the expence of their property, characters and lives: many of these who had hitherto lived debauched, impious, and idolatrous lives; became now sober, temperate, honest, and religious. This was not indeed universally the case, because all were not sincere in their profession; but it was so, to an extent that no other religion could boast. Nay the Pagan religion generally made men morally worse, in proportion to the zeal with which they professed it.

3. The remaining effect of the spirit's effusion was the constancy and readiness with which men suffered the loss of all things, and even martyrdom in its most terrible forms.

—"I cannot omit (says Mr. Addison§) that which appears to me a standing miracle in the three first centuries, I mean that amazing and

* Matt. xxviii. 11—14.

† John xiv. 16, &c.

‡ On the Prophecies, vol. ii. 237. § Apology, ch. 38. Reeve's Tr. vol. 1. 299.

§ Evidences of the Christian Religion, sect. vii.

and supernatural courage or patience, which was shown by innumerable multitudes of martyrs in those slow and painful torments which were inflicted on them. I cannot conceive a man placed in the burning iron chair at Lyons, and the insults and mockeries of a crowded amphitheatre, and still keeping his seat; or stretched upon a grate of iron, over coals of fire, and breathing out his soul among the exquisite suffering of such a tedious execution, rather than renounce his religion or blaspheme his Saviour.—Such trials seem to me above the strength of human nature, and able to overbear duty, reason, faith, conviction, nay, and the most absolute certainty of a future state. Humanity, unbiassed in an extraordinary manner, must have shaken off the present pressure, and have delivered itself out of such dreadful distress by any means that could have been suggested to it. We can easily imagine that many persons in so good a cause might have laid down their lives at the gibbet, the stake, or the block; but to expire leisurely among the most exquisite tortures, when they might come out of them, even by a mental reservation, or an hypocrisy which was not without a possibility of being followed by repentance and forgiveness, has something in it so far beyond the force and natural strength of mortals, that one cannot but think there was some miraculous power to support the sufferer.”

“It is certain, that the deaths and sufferings of the primitive christians had a great share in the conversion of these learned Pagans, who lived in the ages of persecution, which with some intervals and abatements, lasted near 300 years after our Saviour. Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Lactantius, Arnobius, and others, tell us, that this first of all alarmed their curiosity, roused their attention, and made them seriously inquisitive into the nature of that religion, which could endue the mind with so much strength, and overcome the fear of death, nay, raise an earnest desire of it, though it appeared in all its terrors. This they found had not been effected by all the doctrines of those philosophers, whom they had thoroughly studied, and who had been labouring at this great point. The sight of these dying and tormented martyrs, engaged them to search into the history and doctrines of him for whom they suffered. The more they searched, the more they were convinced; till their conviction grew so strong, that they themselves embraced the same truths, and either actually laid down their lives, or were always in a readiness to do it, rather than depart from them.”

I might add, though this fact is most remarkable in the three first centuries, it was not confined to them. The same constancy is observable in those that suffered for the same faith under the popish and other persecutions. God forbid that there should be occasion for any more *such* demonstrations of the power of divine grace and truth!

A REPLY TO

Mr. PAINE's OBJECTIONS to CHRISTIANITY,

In the First Part of his "Age of Reason."

TO follow Mr. P. through all his desultory observations would exceed the limits of this work; but I shall endeavour to reduce what is most material and pertinent to the subject under three classes; *Objections against ANY Revelation—against the CHRISTIAN Revelation—and against* "the three principal means employed (as he says) to impose upon mankind;" viz. MYSTERY, MIRACLE, and PROPHECY. We begin with,

I. Mr. P.'s objections against ANY Revelation. "Revelation (says he) when applied to religion, means something communicated *immediately* from God to man. No one will deny or dispute the power of the Almighty to make such a communication if he pleases. But admitting, for the sake of a case, that something has been revealed to a certain person, and not revealed to any other person, it is revelation to that person only. When he tells it to a second person, a second to a third, a third to a fourth, and so on, it ceases to be a revelation to all other persons. It is a revelation to the first person only, and *hearsay* to every other; and consequently, they are not obliged to believe it*." The whole of this reasoning depends upon the impertinent word "*immediately*," which Mr. P. has marked in Italics, to shew its importance. Certainly, if revelation means something *immediately* communicated from God, then must it be limited to the first or *immediate* communication. But may I not reveal a truth to a third person, through the medium of a second, of such established veracity as to demand belief? Is this possible with men, and impossible with God? Surely no one will assert it. It is no more essential to a divine Revelation that it be *immediate*, than that it be in a voice of thunder, or with the sound of a trumpet.

An established character for integrity always challenges credit, unless the assertion to which our assent is required, be in itself absurd, and very improbable. If we see sufficient reason to believe that a revelation was made to Moses, &c. we are properly speaking believers in revelation; and if the revelation, whatever it be,

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relate to the whole human race, as well as to the person to whom it was *immediately* made, all mankind, Mr. P. himself included, will find themselves under an equal obligation to respect it.

But let us examine the case stated to illustrate this position. "When Moses told the children of Israel that he had received the two tables of the commandments from the hand of God, they were not obliged to believe him, because they had no other authority for it than his telling them so, the commandments carrying no internal evidence of divinity with them*."—Let us state another case parallel to this.

When an ambassador is sent from a foreign prince to our court, offering terms of amity and friendship, we are not obliged to believe his master sent him, merely because he tells us so; nor is there any thing in the message itself but what he might be capable of inventing: how then is he to insure credit?—*By his credentials.*

The credentials of Moses were the miraculous powers with which he was endowed, and of which the Israelites had been repeatedly eye-witnesses.

As to the succeeding prophets, they never required implicit credit, till such time as their prophetic characters were sufficiently established to demand it, either by the performance of some miracle, or the accomplishment of some clear and unequivocal prediction†. The apostles, when they challenged public confidence, healed the sick, raised the dead, and spake all languages by intuition.

II. Let us now consider Mr. Paine's most considerable objections against the CHRISTIAN revelation. Of this, however, I consider the Old Testament as an essential part‡. The New Testament is only a fuller and clearer revelation of what was taught in the Old. Judaism and Christianity are so connected, that they must stand or fall together.—We shall therefore begin where Mr. P. begins, and trace his objections through both Testaments.

"As to the account of the CREATION, (says our author) with which the book of Genesis opens, it has all the appearance of being a tradition which the Israelites had among them before they came into Egypt§." Supposing the account to have been originally traditionary, this will not prove it false. It is reasonable to believe that, before the invention of writing, traditions were preserved with greater care; and the longevity of the Patriarchs was peculiarly favourable to this. Adam might converse with Lamech—Lamech with Shem—Shem with Abraham, or perhaps, Isaac—and another generation would be sufficient to hand down a tradition to the time of Moses. If we trace back the tradition, however, as far as Adam, still it must have come to him by revelation. But as Moses enjoyed so intimate communion with the Deity, and was favoured with so plenary communications from him, it is most reasonable to suppose, that he received the substance of this account from Heaven, during his residence for forty days upon the mount.

But

* P. 5.

† 1 Sam. iii. 19, 20.

‡ See above, p. 6.

§ Age of Reas. p. 13.

But the stile of this account is also, it seems, particularly exceptionable. "It begins abruptly. It is nobody that speaks. It is nobody that hears. It is addressed to nobody. It has neither first, second, nor third person.—It has no voucher*." The celebrated *Longinus*, however, in his Treatise of the sublime, judged differently. Speaking of the Jewish Lawgiver, he calls him an "extraordinary man, who conceived and spake worthily of the power of God, when he writes in the beginning of his laws, *God spake—what? Let there light, and there was light.—Let there be earth; and it was so.*"—Let the reader form his own judgment. I can conceive nothing more worthy of the Supreme than speaking worlds into existence. "He spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast." To exhibit the beauty of Moses's cosmogony to the best advantage, it should be compared with the unintelligible reveries of the heathen philosophers. Compared with them, he is as light to chaos.

But let us pass on.—"Though it is not a direct article of the christian system, that this world that we inhabit is the whole of the habitable creation, yet it is so worked up therewith, from what is called the Mosaic account of the creation, that to believe otherwise, renders the christian system of faith at once little and ridiculous†."—Here are more mistakes than one.

I know it has been commonly supposed, that the Mosaic creation includes the whole universe; but I conceive it extends no further than what we call the solar system. We have business with no more; and the scriptures were not written to gratify idle curiosity. Let us, however, review the account, as we have it in the first chapter of Genesis.

The first state in which our world existed was that of a chaos of various elements. The first work of divine power upon it, placed it in a state of commotion, or rather fermentation. From this the almighty *fiat* produced light, and by the separation of this from darkness effected the first revolution of our sphere from west to east, and marked the period of a natural day, beginning with the evening. On the second day a *firmament*, expanse, or atmosphere was formed, and became the agent for separating the waters which covered the earth from those intended to float on high.—On the third day the earth was formed into cavities and eminences: the former held the waters, and the latter became fertile, and were crowned with vegetables.—On the fourth day were formed other spheres connected with ours:—"the sun, the moon, and the stars;" that is, as I conceive, the planets and satellites of our system.—The fifth day produced all the original species of animals, except man.—The sixth day was devoted to the formation of our first parents, and God having ended his work "BY the seventh day‡," on that day rested; not because he was weary, but that man, who is an imitative creature might follow his example. And this sabbath

* P. 13. † P. 37. ‡ So chap. II. should be rendered; or to that effect,

sabbath, I have no doubt Adam observed in innocency and happiness; though perhaps no other.

This I take to be the simple narrative of Moses, compressed and a little modernized. Now in what particular, give me leave to ask, does this contradict the latest discoveries of philosophy and astronomy? Say you, that besides our system, there are innumerable others of equal magnitude in the universe? Suppose (if you please) the fixed stars to be all suns, around which revolve an infinite variety of planets.—Where do the scriptures contradict it? But says Mr. P. this “renders the christian system at once little and ridiculous.”—*GOD of innumerable worlds!* how doth thy greatness aggrandize thy mercy and benevolence!—As Mr. P. has favoured us with part of one psalm, I will venture to insert part of another, which at the same time may give the reader some idea of the nature of Hebrew poetry. It seems to have been an evening hymn for the time of vintage.

PSALM. VIII.

“JEHOVAH, our Lord! how excellent is thy name in all the earth!
“Who hast displayed thy glorious majesty above the heavens!

“When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers,
“The moon and stars which thou hast ordained,
“What is mortal man that thou rememberest him?
“Or the son of man that thou dost visit him?
“For thou hast made him (but) a little inferior to the angels;
“And hast crowned him with glory and honour.

“JEHOVAH, our Lord! how excellent is thy name in all the earth!”

But if we admit a plurality of worlds, “From whence then could arise the solitary and strange conceit that the Almighty, who had millions of worlds equally dependent on his protection, should quit the care of all the rest, and come to die in our world, because they say, one man and one woman had eaten an apple. And, on the other hand, are we to suppose that every world in the boundless creation had an a Eve, an apple, a serpent, and a Redeemer? In this case, the person who is irreverently called the Son of God, would have nothing else to do than to travel from world to world, in an endless succession of death, with scarcely a momentary interval of life*!”—Who ever formed one of these “strange-conceits” before Mr. P.? What christian ever supposed the Deity confines his care to this world only? Who ever imagined Jesus Christ to have suffered in other worlds? or, that they were guilty and needed a Redeemer?—No: we hope that all other habitable worlds, if there are other, are the residence of holy and happy beings, which therefore need no redemption.

We now proceed to the next history of the Old Testament, viz. The FALL. Here deists triumph; but let the impartial reader seriously attend to the account.

When

When God had created our first parents, he placed them in the most delightful part of the globe, and called it Paradise. Here their employment was to dress the garden, and their food its fruits. That Adam was endued with considerable natural knowledge appears from the original names he bestowed on his domestics—the animal creation*. In addition to this he was favoured with the sublimest communion with the Deity of which flesh and blood seems capable†. Here every thing conspired to make him happy, except a single instance of restraint upon his appetite as a test of his obedience: he was not to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, and this on pain of losing both his happiness and life. He ate and died. Say not, it was hard to die for tasting fruit: the smaller the circumstance, the less the temptation, the easier obedience, and the more aggravated the transgression‡.

Mr. P. calls the fruit “an apple.” He might as well have said it was a pear, an orange, or a bunch of grapes. Moses is silent, and I suppose, for this reason, that it was a fruit, of which no child of Adam ever tasted, for it grew in paradise, where none of his children ever entered. But, whatever was the fruit, it seems to have possessed very pernicious qualities; perhaps intoxicating and poisonous; for it immediately produced irregular sensations, and the shame which follows them; in fact, to borrow Milton’s language, It

“Brought death into the world, and all our woe.”

If the reader be dissatisfied with the history of the fall, let him try if he can find or invent any more rational hypothesis to account for the introduction of moral evil into our world.

I know that some attempts have been made to rob Moses of the honour of writing the Pentateuch, and to give it to some unknown hand; but they have been so weak, and answered so ably, that I shall still venture to attribute these books to the Hebrew legislator; especially as the contrary, if proved, would not materially affect our cause.

I have already pointed out the credentials of Moses, namely, the miracles he wrought, both in the presence of the Egyptians and before

* Gen. ii. 20.

† See Gen. ii. 8—10.

‡ Mr. P. (as others have done before) much diverts himself with the Jewish system of pneumatology and doctrine of dæmons, and that, as usual, without appearing to understand them.—I would recommend to his consideration the universality of the doctrine concerning an evil being, who in the beginning of time had opposed himself, who still continues to oppose himself, to the supreme source of all good. Amongst all nations, in all ages, this opinion prevailed, that human affairs were subject to the will of the gods, and regulated by their interposition. Hence has been derived whatever we have read of the wandering stars of the Chaldeans, two of them beneficent, and two malignant—hence the Egyptian Typho and Osiris—the Persian Arimanius and Oromasdes—the Grecian celestial and infernal Jove—the Brama and Zupa of the Indians, Peruvians, and Mexicans—and the good and evil principle, by whatever names they may be called, of all other barbarous nations. Now does it not appear reasonable to suppose, that an opinion so ancient and so universal, has arisen from tradition concerning the fall of our first parents; disfigured, indeed, and obscured by many fabulous additions?

before all Israel. But they had, if possible, yet stronger proofs of his divine mission. They saw him enter the thick cloud, where the divine presence was terribly manifested; they saw him descend after forty days residence, where they did not think it possible he could have survived; they saw his countenance so irradiated with glory, that they could not stedfastly behold it without a veil; nay farther, they heard the same words which he brought to them on tables of stone, denounced from Heaven in a voice that nothing on earth could imitate*. So far is it from true, as Mr. P. contends, that "they had no other authority for believing their law came from heaven, than his telling them so†."

Still however, our author will insist, that though the ten commandments "contain some good moral precepts," yet do they carry "no internal evidence of divinity with them; on the contrary, he is confident that one clause, that of "visiting the sins of the fathers upon the children," is "contrary to every principle of moral justice‡." The fact, however, is indisputable, that both blessings and calamities are often entailed from one generation to another, and that in private families as well as nations; if Mr. P. can account for the fact upon his principles, we shall not find it hard to account for the threatening upon ours.

But the whole difficulty may be cleared up by one observation, namely, that it is only when children copy and improve on the crimes of their wicked parents, that they draw down upon their own heads redoubled vengeance: so that the innocent never suffer for the guilty, except in such temporal calamities as necessarily result from their parents' crimes; as when the profligacy of one generation involves the next in poverty, or the like. On the contrary, so benevolent is the God of Israel, that the eminent piety of one man is sometimes rewarded with blessings on thousands of his descendants; as was the case with Abraham and his children. This is the God whom deists represent as cruel and vindictive!

With respect to the rest of the Old Testament history, I shall only drop a few general hints, and leave them to the reader's reflection to enlarge and improve.

1. It is unquestionably the most ancient history in the world; and gives the only account of the earliest ages which has the least pretensions to probability.

2. The most ancient historic monuments in the world harmonize with scripture in the most material facts, and where they disagree have much less claim to credit.

3. The candid manner in which the sacred writers, as Moses, David, &c. record their own faults, and the crimes of their own nation, is a strong internal evidence in their favour, such as no other ancient historian can pretend to.

4. There are a great number of incidental matters to be found in these books, relating to geography, natural history, the progress of

* Ex. xx. 18—22.

† P. 5.

‡ Ibid. Note.

of the arts, &c. which would make the inventor of the Bible a prodigy of genius and learning, not to be equalled in ancient or modern times.

5. The Jews were rather incredulous than otherwise, to their own prophets, and strongly biassed in favour of the idolatry of other nations. So that in all ages there were a number of persons who would have willingly discovered, or encouraged any discovery of imposition.

6. The moral character of that nation was by no means so uniformly bad, as Voltaire and some other writers of the same stamp have pretended. In some ages their morals were much purer, and their piety proportionably more fervent than in others. Such was the generation which first entered Canaan with Joshua.

7. The sacred writers, like other historians, are answerable only for facts, not for their morality. If the Jewish history is stained with blood and cruelty, so is that of all other nations, and without the advantage of being relieved by such histories of piety and virtue as abound in scripture.

8. Though many of the events of sacred history are strange and miraculous, yet the occasion of them is generally great and becoming. Many of the circumstances seem, indeed, at this distance of time, unaccountable, and are perhaps greatly misunderstood; partly through the conciseness of the sacred records, and partly through the fruitless comments of learned and unlearned annotators. This is perhaps particularly the case with some particulars in the History of Samson, at which Mr. P. so pleasantly sneers.

There is one little history, however, that of Jonah, which he treats with so much mirth, that I cannot help remarking it, especially as he admits the story to be at least possible; for he owns that the whale was "large enough" to swallow Jonah, though he thinks it would have been better to have reversed the story, and made Jonah swallow the whale, as it would certainly afford more ample room for merriment*. To such a miserable shift are the enemies of revelation reduced, that they are obliged to alter and reverse the sacred records to find room for ridicule and censure; and yet these men are ever complaining of the absurdities of revelation!

The other parts of the Old Testament are either devotional, moral, or prophetic. In the former class the book of Psalms is particularly conspicuous, and has often excited the admiration of persons, who paid little regard to almost any other book of the Hebrew code. Here, however, Mr. P. can recollect but one Psalm, which he thinks any way worth commendation, and which he esteems a true deistical composition, but is certainly very unlucky in fixing on the nineteenth, since the one half of that is expressly composed in commendation of the scriptures: "The law of the Lord is perfect—the statutes of the Lord are right," &c. The only excuse I can make for him is, that he *keeps no Bible*, as himself

himself confesses*, and knew nothing of the psalm but from Mr. Addison's version, which is only of the former part.

As to the *prophets*, Mr. P. lays "the ax at once to the root" of revelation by demonstrating that the term *prophet* meant originally a poet or musician†. I beg leave to say, that having examined every text in which the term has been supposed to signify poet or musician (for the notion is not new, though the proof is,) I am convinced that, however connected or introduced, the term *prophet*, in every instance, includes the idea of inspiration, real or pretended; so that when it is applied to a musician or poet, it always means an inspired one.

The prophets, no doubt, generally delivered themselves in elevated language, such as is said to constitute *poetry*; but if Mr. P. had not forgot the contents of his Bible, he would have recollected, that the Jewish prophets, in the plainest of all language, predicted many important future events, so as to be entitled to the name of *prophets* in the strictest, and what he calls the modern sense of the word. These predictions he ought to compare with the events predicted. It is not his arbitrarily changing the signification of a word that can avail him any thing.

Any person who only looks into his Bible, must smile at Mr. P.'s palpable mistake of the meaning of the term "*greater and lesser prophets*"; for it has no relation whatever to what they wrote, or to the manner of their writing, but only to the quantity of it. Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, whose books are comparatively large, are, on that account, called *the greater prophets*. Whereas, Hosea, and eleven others, who wrote but little, are therefore called the *lesser prophets*.

It would be a painful task to run over all the abuses Mr. P. bestows on the sacred writings, in calling them "trash—paltry and contemptible tales—obscene stories," &c. &c. which language can only shew that an author is angry, and obliged to substitute words for arguments.

We now close the Bible, in Mr. P.'s sense of that term, who restricts it to the Old Testament, as distinguished from the New.—Let us open the New Testament. "The *new* Testament! (says Mr. P.) that is, the *new* Will, as if there could be two wills of the Creator‡.

I believe it is pretty well agreed that, the Greek term rendered *Testament* being ambiguous, the proper title of this book is the *New Covenant*. How ridiculous then does Mr. P. make himself, by his serious contest with such errors?

We cannot attend to all the mistakes and absurdities of "The Age of Reason:" a few of the most prominent must be selected. Mr. P. says that "the most extraordinary of all the things called miracles, related in the New Testament, is that of the devil flying away with Jesus Christ, and carrying him to the top of a high mountain,

* P. 24.

† P. 15.

‡ P. 16.

mountain, and to the top of the highest pinnacle of the temple*." But the probability is, either that all this scenery was a vision, or a figurative account of what passed in the mind of Jesus, representing all the trials to which he would be exposed in the course of his public ministry.

We now come to the two most important facts on which christianity is founded—the *death* and *resurrection* of Jesus Christ. The first of these is, indeed, admitted, but in terms that throw reproach upon his sacred character.

"The manner (Mr. P. says) in which he was apprehended, shews he was not much known at that time, and it shews also that the meetings he then held with his followers were in secret, and that he had given over, or suspended preaching publicly. Judas could no otherwise betray him, than by giving information where he was, and pointing him out to the officers, who went to arrest him; and the reason for employing and paying Judas for this, could arise only from the causes already mentioned; that of his not being much known, and living concealed†." This difficulty, however, is easily removed. The apprehension of Jesus was to be in the night, and by the common officers of justice; and it is very possible that, let a man be ever so well known in the day time, such persons as these might neither be able to find him in the night, nor distinguish his person at that time, without some assistance. Besides, why did the Jewish rulers think it necessary to use the precaution of apprehending Jesus in the night, but because he was so popular at that time with the common people, that the apprehending of him in the day time was thought to be too hazardous? That the preaching of Jesus was then, and at all times, most public, his whole history clearly shews; and when he was seized in the night, he himself said, "Are ye come out as against a thief, with swords and with staves to take me? I was daily with you in the temple, teaching, and ye took me not‡."

But, says Mr. P. "The idea of the concealment of Jesus, not only agrees very ill with his reputed divinity, but associates with it something of pusillanimity; and his being betrayed, or in other words, his being apprehended, on the information of one of his followers, shews that he did not intend to be apprehended; and consequently that he did not intend to be crucified||."

It would be of material consequence to the cause of infidelity, that what Mr. P. here asserts should be true, viz. that Jesus had no apprehension of the violent death to which he was exposed. But the whole of his history shews, that he knew from the beginning that he was to die in consequence of his undertaking, and by a public crucifixion; and though for some time he chose to withdraw himself from the persecution of his enemies, it was only till the proper time was come, for his throwing himself into their hands.

D

Some

* P. 47.

† P. 47.

‡ Mark xiv. 48.

|| Age of Reas. p 18.

Some time before his last journey to Jerusalem, it is said, "From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples how that he must go up unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders, and chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day*." At the same time, and on other occasions, he plainly forewarned his followers, that they must be ready to suffer as he did; language which was ill calculated to favour any conceivable purpose of an impostor.

In one of the public discourses of Jesus, in which he compared himself to a shepherd, he said, "I lay down my life for the sheep, and therefore does my father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again†."

On his last journey to Jerusalem, he said, "The son of man shall be betrayed into the hands of men, and they shall kill him, and the third day he shall be raised again‡;" when we find the disciples, to whom this language was addressed, as was natural, "exceedingly sorry."

But nothing shews the steady purpose of Jesus to give up his life in his undertaking, whatever it was, more clearly, than his solemn institution of the eucharist the very night in which he was betrayed, expressly, as a memorial of his death, the bread representing his body, which was to be broken, and the wine his blood, which was to be shed. And all his discourses to his disciples, recorded in John xiv. xv. and xvi. and his solemn prayer, ch. xvii. as they went to the garden of Gethsemane, were calculated to comfort them with respect to his approaching death, and his temporary separation from them.

As Jesus knew from the beginning the purpose of Judas, why, if he did not mean to be apprehended, did he go to the place where he expected to meet him, and why did he not endeavour to make his escape, which, when they who came to apprehend him (probably overawed by his presence and manner of speaking) "fell to the ground§," he had an opportunity of doing? When he was in the presence of his Jewish judges and of Pilate, did he behave like a person who wished to avoid the fate that he could not but see was impending over him? Had he recourse to any mean submission, or apologies, to save his life? Nay, did he not shew as great marks of presence of mind, and calm intrepidity, as any person ever shewed in the face of certain death?

Mr. P. says, "The christian mythologists tell us that Christ died for the sins of the world, and that he came on purpose to die. Would it not then have been the same if he had died of a fever, or of the small pox, of old age, or of any thing else||?" Now it is obvious to observe, that had Christ died of any disease, and of course in *private*, among his friends, it would always have been said by unbelievers, that he never had been actually dead; whereas this could

* Matt. xvi. 21. † John x. 17. ‡ Matt. xvii. 22. § John xviii. 6.

|| Age of Reas. p. 18.

could not be said of a person, who was condemned to death by his enemies, and publicly crucified.

But the grand attack is upon the *resurrection*. "The resurrection and ascension, supposing them to have taken place, admitted of public and ocular demonstration, like that of the ascension of a balloon, or the sun at noon-day, to all Jerusalem at least. A thing which every body is required to believe, requires that the proof and evidence of it should be equal to all, and universal; and as the public visibility of this last related act was the only evidence that could give sanction to the former part, the whole of it falls to the ground, because that evidence was never given*."

Supposing for a moment, that God were pleased to make a divine revelation of his will to mortals, or to require our assent to a series of historical facts, it is certainly very becoming for such creatures as we are to dictate, *à priori*, the kind and degree of evidence on which we choose to believe them! Admitting, however, that Jesus Christ had arose and ascended in the sight of all Jerusalem, let us see what better evidence would this have afforded us of the fact. All the inhabitants of Jerusalem are long since dead; that they did see it, therefore, we could not possibly have any other evidence than that of a few historians of those ages, and these historians would lay open to the same cavils and objections as the evangelical writers. Mr. P. would still tell us that it rested upon the credit of eight or nine (perhaps not so many) witnesses, who say they saw it, and that the rest of the inhabitants saw it, whence "all the rest of the world are called upon to believe it." And if he could meet with but one unbelieving *Thomas*, who being absent from Jerusalem, happened not to see it, he would add, "Thomas did not believe the resurrection; and as they say, would not believe, without having ocular and manual demonstration himself. So neither will I; and the reason is equally as good for me, and for every other person, as for Thomas." So that the objection to the small number of witnesses of this event is reduced to a mere cavil, for if "ocular and manual demonstration" be *necessary*, then *no* historic evidence can be sufficient.

And that it would not be thought so, is evident from a comparison with other parallel facts. For instance, the supernatural darkness and earthquake which accompanied the crucifixion must have been witnessed by, not only all Jerusalem, but all the inhabitants of Judea at least†; and yet I dare aver Mr. P. believes as little of this as he does of the resurrection. So true is the assertion of Jesus Christ, that, if men "hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one (even) arose from the dead‡."

The witnesses of the resurrection, however, were more than Mr. P. is willing to admit. Besides Mary the mother of Jesus, Mary Magdalen and several other women, "he was seen of Cephas, [i. e. Peter] then of the twelve; after that he was seen of above five

* P. 7.

† Matt. xxvii. 45, 51—54.

‡ Luke xvi. 31.

five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present time, [i. e. about A. D. 56.] but the rest are fallen asleep. After that he was seen of James; then of all the apostles. And last of all, says St. Paul, was seen of me also*."—These are "the small number of persons, not more than eight or nine," who witnessed the resurrection!

But we are told "the best surviving evidence we now have respecting this affair is the Jews. They are regularly descended from the people who lived in the times this resurrection and ascension is said to have happened, and they say, *it is not true*†." They are also regularly descended from the people before whom Moses and the prophets wrought their miracles, and they say that they *are true*:—from the people of whom we read so many extraordinary histories, which they also aver to be *true*:—from the people "to whom were committed the oracles of God," and they assert that these likewise *are true*; in all these things, however, it seems they deserve no credit, because their testimony is in favour of Revelation:—but when they witness against christianity, and say the resurrection is *not true*, then their's is the "best evidence we now have." But why? Hear the Reason of the Age!

"Jesus Christ (says he) preached most excellent morality, and the equality of man; but he preached also against the corruptions and avarice of the Jewish priests, and this brought upon him the hatred and vengeance of the whole order of priesthood. The accusation which these priests brought against him, was that of sedition and conspiracy against the Roman government, to which the Jews were then subject and tributary; . . . between the two [the Jews and Romans] this virtuous reformer and revolutionist lost his life‡." That is, in short, the reason why the Jews in this case, and in this only, deserve credit, is because their fathers hated and murdered Jesus Christ, in the most cruel and unjust manner! This I must confess, to borrow Mr. P.'s expression, "for absurdity and extravagance is not to be exceeded by any thing" I ever met with.

After alluding to the apparent variations among the evangelists, (which are by no means important or unaccountable,)—Mr. P. says, "All the other parts of the New Testament, except the book of enigmas, called the Revelations, are a collection of letters under the name of epistles; and the forgery of letters has been such a common practice in the world, that the probability is, at least, equal, whether they are genuine or forged||." The same may be said of other epistles, those of Pliny and Cicero for instance, as of those of the New Testament. A strange method this of getting rid of historic evidence! and which may be applied with equal propriety to every other species of records, as to the epistles. Histories, lives, and poetic compositions have all been forged under the most respectable names, therefore none of them are to be depended on, and in the next century it may become a query, whether Thomas Paine himself ever existed.

* 1 Cor. xv. 5—8.

† Age of Reas. p. 8.

‡ Ibid.

|| P. 19.

To the book of *Revelation* Mr. P. would not, perhaps, have so strongly objected, had he been aware that it predicted the French Revolution*; at least it is certain that *Jurieu* in France†, and *Fleming* in England‡, to name no more, foretold such an event at the very period in which it happened; however, the best evidence to the divine authority of this book, is to be found in the last volume of Bishop *Newton's* Dissertations on the prophecies.

III. We now come, in the last place, to consider what Mr. P. calls "the three principal means that have been employed in all ages, and perhaps in all countries, to impose upon mankind. Those three means are *Mystery*, *Miracle*, and *Prophecy*. The two first (he adds) are incompatible with true religion, and the third ought always to be suspected ||."

I. "With respect to MYSTERY, every thing we behold, is, in one sense, a mystery to us. Our own existence is a mystery: the whole vegetable world is a mystery. We cannot account how it is that an acorn, when put into the ground, is made to develope itself, and become an oak. We know not how it is that the seed we sow unfolds and multiplies itself, and returns to us such an abundant interest for so small a capital.

"The fact however, as distinct from the operating cause, is not a mystery, because we see it; and we know also the means we are to use, which is no other than putting the seed into the ground. We know therefore, as much as is necessary for us to know; and that part of the operation that we do not know, and which, if we did, we could not perform, the Creator takes upon himself and performs it for us. We are therefore better off than if we had been let into the secret, and left to do it for ourselves§."

In these observations I have the happiness perfectly to agree with Mr. P. and thank him much for so ably answering his own objections. Let us apply this reasoning to the mysteries of natural and revealed religion. The *existence of God* is a mystery. "The fact, however, as distinct from" the manner of it, "is not a mystery, because we see" the fullest evidence of it in every thing around us. "We know therefore as much as is necessary for us to know" in order to dictate the duties we owe to our Creator.

Again, the doctrine of divine *omnipresence* is itself a mystery. "The fact, however, as distinct from" the mode "is not a mystery, because" Reason strongly indicates it must be so, and Revelation positively asserts it.

"But (says Mr. P.) the word mystery cannot be applied to *moral truth*;" that is, if I understand the proposition, there is no mystery in our moral duties, because they are all obvious, or revealed. This is granted; but the following inferences have no relation to these premises.

"The

* Rev. xi. 13.

† The Fulfilment of Scrip. Proph.

‡ Rise and Fall of Popery.

|| Age of Reason, p. 43.

§ P. 44.

"The God in whom we believe is a God of moral truth, and not a God of mystery. . . . Religion, therefore, being the belief of a God, and the practice of moral truth, cannot have any connection with mystery. The belief of a God, so far from having any thing of mystery in it, is of all things the most easy, because it arises to us, as is before observed, out of necessity. And the practice of moral truth, or in other words, a practical imitation of the moral goodness of God, is no other than our acting towards each other, as he acts benignly towards all*."—Here are several mistakes of considerable importance. If by "the belief of a God," Mr. P. intends only a believing that there is a God, this indeed is not mysterious, but then it is a small part of religion: the worst men in the world generally admit this. If he means to include a belief of the divine perfections, as omnipresence, omniscience, &c. these subjects are full of mystery, as already observed†. But the most striking defect in Mr. P.'s religion, is, that it admits no kind of religious worship, private or social: for he comprehends the whole in faith and morals. What then, is the boasted religion of nature reduced to this? Are no grateful acknowledgements to be made to our bountiful benefactor? No prayer to be offered for his blessings, favours, or protection? Alas! it should seem not: for in another part of his work Mr. P. condemns and ridicules every thing which bears the appearance of piety or devotion. "Humility" he styles "ingratitude;"—Prayer is, with him, a presumptuous "attempt to make the Almighty change his mind‡."—O, Socrates! O, Plato! by what indignant name wouldst thou have called this religion?

2. MIRACLES in every point of view appear to Mr. P. both "improbable" and "unnecessary." He says, "Unless we know the whole extent of the laws, and of what are commonly called the powers of nature, we are not able to judge whether any thing that may appear to us wonderful or miraculous, be within, or be beyond, or be contrary to, her natural power of acting||."

To this it is easy to reply, that though no man knows the whole extent of the powers, or laws of nature, we are sufficiently well acquainted with *some* of them. Not to mention the case of the death of the first born, and of the first born only, both of men and of cattle, throughout the whole land of Egypt, in one hour of one particular night, and that distinctly announced beforehand; or the dividing the Red Sea or the river Jordan, so that a whole nation could march through them at their leisure, which are facts in the Old Testament history: will Mr. P. himself say, that the instantaneous cure of all kinds of diseases, not excepting those that require the longest medical treatment, such as dropsies, palsies, and infan-

sanity,

* P. 44.

† "Christian mythology," Mr. P. says, p. 36, "has five deities. There is God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Ghost, the God Providence, and the Goddess Nature." On what authority he asserts this, is best known to himself. He might just as well have said, that christians had fifty, or five hundred deities.

‡ P. 21.

|| P. 45.

sanity, by a word speaking, was within the usual course of nature ; or that a person could walk on the sea, and still a tempest, by command, without a miracle? Still less will he say, that a person who had been crucified on Friday, and left alone in a sepulchre, could walk about and converse on the Sunday following, as if nothing had been done to him, without a miracle. Admitting the facts to be, as they are represented in the gospel history, he would surely say, that little as we know of the whole compass of nature, such things as *these* are clearly beyond it, and unquestionably *super-natural*."

Mr. P. raises this question, whether, "it is more probable that nature should go out of her course, or that a man should tell a lie?" and determines it "at least millions to one, that the reporter tells a lie*." This may be true enough, for ought I know, of some men ; but there is a great difference in characters ; and the impropriety of this way of reasoning is evident, by applying it to another case. Mr. P. mentions the power of electricity—suppose he was to tell an illiterate countryman, that by an electrical machine he could extract flashes of fire from the human body, and that without giving any painful sensations ; might not the clown reply, "millions of lies have I heard told, but such a thing I never saw ; it is therefore millions to one that you tell a lie?"

But to bring the question to a closer issue. It is allowed on all hands that Jesus Christ did pretend to work miracles.—Mr. P. says Jesus Christ was "a virtuous and an amiable man"—that "the morality he preached and practised was of the most benevolent kind†."—Now, if miracles are all tricks of *legerdemain*, as Mr. P. represents them‡, how can he reconcile the conduct of Jesus Christ with his own character of him? Is it not, in his own words degrading "a virtuous reformer" to represent him as "a show-man, playing tricks to amuse and make the people stare and wonder||?" If Jesus only imposed on vulgar credulity, he must be an impostor, and consequently not "virtuous and amiable:" if he was "virtuous and amiable," he was not an impostor, but really wrought the miracles he pretended to.

3. And lastly. To get rid of the evidence of PROPHECY, Mr. P. resolves it into wild guess and conjecture. "The original meaning of the words *prophet* and *prophesying* (he says) has been changed, and a prophet, in the sense in which the word is now used, is a creature of modern invention ; and it is owing to this change in the meaning of the words, that the flights and metaphors of the Jewish poets, and phrases and expressions now rendered obscure by our not being acquainted with the local circumstances to which they applied at the time they were used, have been erected into prophecies. . . . If by a prophet, we are to suppose a man to whom the Almighty communicated some event that would take place in future, either there were such men, or there were not. If there

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* P. 47.

† P. 7.

‡ P. 45.

|| P. 46.

were, it is consistent to believe that the event so communicated would be told in terms that could be understood, and not related in such a loose and obscure manner as to be out of the comprehension of those who heard it, and so equivocal as to fit almost any circumstance that might happen afterwards*."

I appeal to any person who is in the habit of reading the Bible, whether Mr. P.'s account of prophecy, or that which I shall give, be the more just. Prophets, in the scripture sense of the word, were men to whom God communicated whatever he intended to be delivered to others. Some of these communications were moral admonitions, but others were distinct, unequivocal annunciations of future events, to take place, either very soon, or at distant periods. Such are the prophecies of Moses, now in a state of fulfilment, concerning the future history of the Israelitish nation; those of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and others, concerning many particular definite events, which happened in their own time, as well as the future glorious state of their nation, and the peaceful and happy state of the world in general, and those of Daniel concerning the succession of the four great monarchies. Let any person of common discernment peruse these prophecies, and say, whether they could have been written so long before the events by *guess* or by *accident*?

Some parts of the book of Daniel, and also of the Revelation, are written in such a manner, that it is probable we shall not understand them completely, till we can compare them with the events to which they are to correspond. But the reason of the obscurity of those particular prophecies, concerning events which are yet to come, is pretty obvious. For as these prophecies are now in the hands of those who respect them, it might have been said that they contributed to their own fulfilment, by the friends of revelation endeavouring to bring about the events predicted. However, though some intermediate steps in the great train of events be thus obscure, both the great outline of the whole, and the catastrophe, are most clearly expressed†.

I have now gone through what was proposed; and shall conclude with observing, from the close of the first part of the pamphlet before us, that all the comfort which the sum total of Mr. P.'s discoveries in religion leaves to a good man, as to futurity, is, that "the Power that gave us existence is ABLE to continue it."—To such writers I would take up Job's parable, and say—"Miserable comforters are ye all, and physicians of no value."

A REPLY

* P. 48.

† Concerning the Jewish expectation of a Messiah, the dispersion and present state of the Jews, the exact agreement of Isa. liii. with the narrative of Christ's sufferings, his prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem (which is incontrovertibly proved to have been delivered before the event took place), and the prophecies concerning Antichrist,—the reader is referred to Sir Isaac Newton, Bishop Newton, and Lowman on the prophecies, and Lowth upon Isaiah; where he will find the whole of these, with many more, beautifully illustrated and explained.

A REPLY TO
THE OBJECTIONS TO THE BIBLE,

In the Second Part of the "Age of Reason."

ADDRESSED TO THOMAS PAINE.

SIR,

IN the preface to your book, entitled—The Age of Reason, part the second,—you state, that a fever, which you and those about you expected would prove mortal, made you remember, with renewed satisfaction, that you had written the former part of your Age of Reason—and you know therefore, you say, by experience, the conscientious trial of your own principles. I admit this declaration to be a proof of the sincerity of your persuasion, but I cannot admit it to be any proof of the truth of your principles. What is conscience? Is it, as has been thought, an internal monitor implanted in us by the Supreme Being, and dictating to us, on all occasions, what is right or wrong? or is it merely our own judgment of the moral rectitude or turpitude of our own actions? I take the word (with Mr. Locke) in the latter, as in the only intelligible sense. Now who sees not that our judgments of virtue and vice, right and wrong, are not always formed from an enlightened and dispassionate use of our reason, in the investigation of truth? They are more generally formed from the nature of the religion we profess; from the quality of the civil government under which we live; from the general manners of the age, or the particular manners of the persons with whom we associate; from the education we have had in our youth; from the books we have read at a more advanced period; and from other accidental causes. Who sees not that, on this account, conscience may be conformable or repugnant to the law of nature?—may be certain, or doubtful?—and that it can be no criterion of moral rectitude, even when it is certain, because the certainty of an opinion is no proof of its being a right opinion? A man may be certainly persuaded of an error in reasoning, or of an untruth in matters of fact. It is a maxim of every law, human and divine, that a man ought never to act in opposition to his conscience: but it will not from thence follow,

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that he will, in obeying the dictates of his conscience, on all occasions act right. An inquisitor, who burns Jews and heretics; a Robespierre who massacres innocent and harmless women; a robber, who thinks that all things ought to be in common, and that a state of property is an unjust infringement of natural liberty:—these, and a thousand perpetrators of different crimes, may all follow the dictates of conscience; and may, at the real or supposed approach of death, remember “with renewed satisfaction” the worst of their transactions, and experience, without dismay, “a conscientious trial of their principles.” But this their conscientious composure can be no proof to others of the rectitude of their principles, and ought to be no pledge to themselves of their innocence, in adhering to them.

I have thought fit to make this remark, with a view of suggesting to you a consideration of great importance—whether you have examined calmly, and according to the best of your ability, the arguments by which the truth of revealed religion may, in the judgment of learned and impartial men, be established?—You will allow, that thousands of learned and impartial men, in all ages, have embraced revealed religion as true. Whether these men have all been in an error, enveloped in the darkness of ignorance, shackled by the chains of superstition, whilst you and a few others have enjoyed light and liberty, is a question I submit to the decision of your readers.

If you have made the best examination you can, and yet reject revealed religion as an imposture, I pray that God may pardon what I esteem your error. And whether you have made this examination or not, does not become me or any man to determine. That gospel, which you despise, has taught me this moderation; it has said to me—“Who art thou that judgest another man’s servant? To his own master he standeth or falleth.”—I think that you are in an error; but whether that error be to you a vincible or an invincible error, I presume not to determine. The consequence of your unbelief must be left to the just and merciful judgment of him, who alone knoweth the mechanism and the liberty of our understandings; the origin of our opinions; the strength of our prejudices; the excellencies and the defects of our reasoning faculties.

You disclaim all learned appeals to other books, and undertake to prove, from the Bible itself, that it is unworthy of credit. I hope to shew, from the Bible itself, the direct contrary. But in case any of your readers should think that you have not put forth all your strength, by not referring for proof of your opinion to ancient authors; lest they should suspect that all ancient authors are in your favour; I will venture to affirm that had you made a learned appeal to all the ancient books in the world, sacred or profane, christian, jewish, or pagan, instead of lessening, they would have established, the credit and authority of the Bible as the Word of God.

Quitting

Quitting your preface, let us proceed to the work itself. The first question you propose for consideration is—"Whether there is sufficient authority for believing the Bible to be the Word of God, or whether there is not*?"—You determine this question in the negative, upon what you are pleased to call moral evidence. You hold it impossible that the Bible can be the Word of God, because it is therein said, that the Israelites destroyed the Canaanites by the express command of God: and to believe the Bible to be true, we must, you affirm, unbelieve all our belief of the moral justice of God; for wherein, you ask, could crying or smiling infants offend?—I am astonished that you should attempt to disparage the Bible, by bringing forward this exploded and frequently refuted objection of Morgan, Tindal, and Bolingbroke. You profess yourself to be a deist, and to believe that there is a God, who created the universe, and established the laws of nature, by which it is sustained in existence. You profess that from the contemplation of the works of God, you derive a knowledge of his attributes; and you reject the Bible, because it ascribes to God things inconsistent (as you suppose) with the attributes which you have discovered to belong to him; in particular, you think it repugnant to his moral justice, that he should doom to destruction the crying or smiling infants of the Canaanites.—Why do you not maintain it to be repugnant to his moral justice, that he should suffer crying or smiling infants to be swallowed up by an earthquake, drowned by an inundation, consumed by a fire, starved by a famine, or destroyed by a pestilence? The Word of God is in perfect harmony with his work; crying or smiling infants are subjected to death in both. We believe that the earth, at the express command of God, opened her mouth, and swallowed up Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, with their wives, their sons, and their little ones†. This you esteem so repugnant to God's moral justice, that you spurn, as spurious, the book in which the circumstance is related. When Catania, Lima, and Lisbon, were severally destroyed by earthquakes, men with their wives, their sons, and their little ones, were swallowed up alive:—why do you not spurn as spurious, the book of nature, in which this fact is certainly written, and from the perusal of which you infer the moral justice of God? You will, probably, reply, that the evils which the Canaanites suffered from the express command of God, were different from those which are brought on mankind by the operation of the laws of nature.—Different! in what?—Not in the magnitude of the evil—not in the subjects of suffering—not in the author of it—for my philosophy, at least, instructs me to believe, that God not only primarily formed, but that he hath through all ages executed, the laws of nature; and that he will through all eternity administer them, for the general happiness of his creatures, whether we can, on every occasion, discern that end or not.

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* P. 1.

† Numb. xvi. 27—33.

I am far from being guilty of the impiety of questioning the existence of the moral justice of God, as proved either by natural or revealed religion; what I contend for is shortly this—that you have no right, in fairness of reasoning, to urge any apparent deviation from moral justice, as an argument against revealed religion, because you do not urge an equally apparent deviation from it, as an argument against natural religion; you reject the former, and admit the latter, without considering that, as to your objection, they must stand or fall together.

As to the Canaanites, it is needless to enter into any proof of the depraved state of their morals; they were a wicked people in the time of Abraham, and they, even then, were devoted to destruction by God; but their iniquity was not then full*. In the time of Moses, they were idolaters, sacrificers of their own crying or smiling infants; devourers of human flesh; addicted to unnatural lust; immersed in the filthiness of all manner of vice†. Now, I think, it will be impossible to prove that it was a proceeding contrary to God's moral justice, to exterminate so wicked a people. He made the Israelites the executors of his vengeance; and, in doing this, he gave such an evident and terrible proof of his abomination of vice, as could not fail to strike the surrounding nations with astonishment and terror, and to impress on the minds of the Israelites what they were to expect, if they followed the example of the nations whom he commanded them to cut off. "Ye shall not commit any of these abominations—that the land spue not you out also, as it spued out the nations that were before you." How strong and descriptive this language! the vices of the inhabitants were so abominable, that the very land was sick of them, and forced to vomit them forth, as the stomach disgorges a deadly poison.

Most unbelievers argue as if they thought that man, in remote and rude antiquity, in the very birth and infancy of our species, had the same distinct conceptions of one, eternal, invisible, incorporeal, infinitely wise, powerful, and good God, which they themselves have now. This I look upon as a great mistake, and a pregnant source of infidelity. Human kind, by long experience; by the institutions of civil society; by the cultivation of arts and sciences; by, as I believe divine instruction actually given to some, and traditionally communicated to all; is in a far more distinguished situation, as to the powers of the mind, than it was in the childhood of the world. The history of man is the history of the providence of God; who willing the supreme felicity of all his creatures, has adapted his government to the capacity of those, who in different ages were the subjects of it. The history of any one nation throughout all ages, and that of all nations in the same age, are but separate parts of one great plan, which God is carrying on for the moral melioration of mankind. But who can comprehend

* Gen. xv. 16,

† Exod. xxxiv. 10—16.

Levit. xviii. 19—28.

Deut. xii. 2, 3.

prehend the whole of this immense design? The shortness of life, the weakness of our faculties, the inadequacy of our means of information, conspire to make it impossible for us completely to understand any one of its parts. No man, who well weighs the subject, ought to be surprised, that in the histories of antient times many things should occur foreign to our manners, the propriety and necessity of which we cannot clearly apprehend.

It appears incredible to many, that God Almighty should have had colloquial intercourse with our first parents; that he should have contracted a kind of friendship for the patriarchs, and entered into covenant with them; that he should have suspended the laws of nature in Egypt: should have been so apparently partial as to become the God and governor of one particular nation; and should have so far demeaned himself, as to give to that people a burdensome ritual of worship, statutes and ordinances, many of which seem to be beneath the dignity of his attention, unimportant and impolitic. I have conversed with many deists, and have always found that the strangeness of these things was the only reason for their disbelief of them: nothing similar has happened in their time; they will not, therefore, admit, that these events have really taken place at any time. As well might a child, when arrived at a state of manhood, contend that he had never either stood in need of or experienced the fostering care of a mother's kindness, the wearisome attention of his nurse, or the instruction and discipline of his schoolmaster. The Supreme Being selected one family from an idolatrous world; nursed it up, by various acts of his providence, into a great nation; communicated to that nation a knowledge of his holiness, justice, mercy, power, and wisdom; disseminated them, at various times, through every part of the earth, that they might be a "leaven to leaven the whole lump," that they might assure all other nations of the existence of one supreme God, the creator and preserver of the world, the only proper object of adoration. With what reason can we expect, that what was done to one nation, not out of any partiality to them, but for the general good, should be done to all? that the mode of instruction, which was suited to the infancy of the world, should be extended to the maturity of its manhood, or to the imbecility of its old age? I own to you, that when I consider how nearly man, in a savage state, approaches to the brute creation, as to intellectual excellence; and when I contemplate his miserable attainments, as to the knowledge of God, in a civilized state, when he has had no divine instruction on the subject, or when that instruction has been forgotten, (for all men have known something of God from tradition,) I cannot but admire the wisdom and goodness of the Supreme Being, in having let himself down to our apprehensions; in having given to mankind, in the earliest ages, sensible and extraordinary proofs of his existence and attributes; in having made the jewish and christian dispensations mediums to convey to all men, through

through all ages, that knowledge concerning himself, which he had vouchsafed to give immediately to the first.

Before you commence your grand attack upon the Bible, you wish to establish a difference between the evidence necessary to prove the authenticity of the Bible, and that of any other ancient book. In this part your ideas seem to me to be confused; I do not say that you, designedly, jumble together mathematical science and historical evidence; the knowledge acquired by demonstration, and the probability derived from testimony.—You know but of one ancient book, that authoritatively challenges universal consent and belief, and that is Euclid's Elements*.—If I were disposed to make frivolous objections, I should say that even Euclid's Elements had not met with universal consent; that there had been men, both in ancient and modern times, who had questioned the intuitive evidence of some of his axioms, and denied the justness of some of his demonstrations: but, admitting the truth, I do not see the pertinency of your observation. You are attempting to subvert the authenticity of the Bible, and you tell us that Euclid's Elements are certainly true.—What then?—Does it follow that the Bible is certainly false? The most illiterate scrivener in the kingdom does not want to be informed, that the examples in his Wingate's Arithmetic, are proved by a different kind of reasoning from that by which he persuades himself to believe, that there was such a person as Henry VIII. or that there is such a city as Paris.

It may be of use, to remove this confusion in your argument, to state, distinctly, the difference between the genuineness, and the authenticity, of a book. A genuine book, is that which was written by the person whose name it bears, as the author of it. An authentic book, is that which relates matters of fact, as they really happened. A book may be genuine, without being authentic; and a book may be authentic, without being genuine. The books written by Richardson and Fielding are genuine books, though the histories of Clarissa and Tom Jones are fables. Anson's Voyage may be considered as an authentic book, it, probably, containing a true narration of the principal events recorded in it; but it is not a genuine book, having not been written by Walters, to whom it is ascribed, but by Robins.

This distinction between the genuineness and authenticity of a book, will assist us in detecting the fallacy of an argument, which you state with great confidence in the part of your work now under consideration, and which you frequently allude to, in other parts, as conclusive evidence against the truth of the Bible. Your argument stands thus—if it be found that the books ascribed to Moses, Joshua, and Samuel, were not written by Moses, Joshua, and Samuel, every part of the authority and authenticity of these books is gone at once†.—I presume to think otherwise. The genuineness of these books (in the judgment of those who say that they

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* P. 3.

† Ibid.

were written by these authors) will certainly be gone; but their authenticity may remain; they may still contain a true account of real transactions, though the names of the writers of them should be found to be different from what they are generally esteemed to be.

Had, indeed, Moses said that he wrote the five first books of the Bible; and had Joshua and Samuel said that they wrote the books which are respectively attributed to them; and had it been found, that Moses, Joshua, and Samuel, did not write these books; then, I grant, the authority of the whole would have been gone at once; these men would have been found liars, as to the genuineness of the books, and this proof of their want of veracity, in one point, would have invalidated their testimony in every other; these books would have been justly stigmatized, as neither genuine nor authentic.

An history may be true, though it should not only be ascribed to a wrong author, but though the author of it should not be known; anonymous testimony does not destroy the reality of facts, whether natural or miraculous.

As to your assertion, that the miracles recorded in Tacitus, and in other profane historians, are quite as well authenticated as those of the Bible*,—it, being a mere assertion destitute of proof, may be properly answered by a contrary assertion. I take the liberty then to say, that the evidence for the miracles recorded in the Bible is, both in kind and degree, so greatly superior to that for the prodigies mentioned by Livy, or the miracles related by Tacitus, as to justify us in giving credit to the one as the work of God, and in withholding it from the other as the effect of superstition and imposture. This method of derogating from the credibility of christianity, by opposing to the miracles of our Saviour, the tricks of ancient impostors, seems to have originated with Hierocles in the fourth century; and it has been adopted by unbelievers from that time to this; with this difference, indeed, that the heathens of the third and fourth century admitted that Jesus wrought miracles; but lest that admission should compel them to abandon their gods and become christians, they said, that their *Apollonius*, their *Apuleius*, their *Aristeus*, did as great: whilst modern deists deny the fact of Jesus having ever wrought a miracle. And they have some reason for this proceeding; they are sensible that the gospel miracles are so different, in all their circumstances, from those related in pagan story, that, if they admit them to have been performed, they must admit christianity to be true; hence they have fabricated a kind of deistical axiom—that no human testimony can establish the credibility of a miracle.—This, though it has been an hundred times refuted, is still insisted upon, as if its truth had never been questioned, and could not be disproved.

You “ proceed to examine the authenticity of the Bible; and you begin, you say, with what are called the five books of Moses; Genesis,

Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. Your intention, you profess, is to shew that these books are spurious, and that Moses is not the author of them; and still farther, that they were not written in the time of Moses, nor till several hundred years afterwards; that they are no other than an attempted history of the life of Moses, and of the times in which he is said to have lived, and also of the times prior thereto, written by some very ignorant and stupid pretender to authorship, several hundred years after the death of Moses*."—In this passage, the utmost force of your attack on the authority of the five books of Moses is clearly stated. You are not the first who has started this difficulty; it is a difficulty, indeed of modern date; having not been heard of, either in the synagogue, or out of it, till the twelfth century. About that time *Aben Ezra*, a Jew of great erudition, noticed some passages (the same that you have brought forward) in the five first books of the Bible, which he thought had not been written by Moses, but inserted by some person after the death of Moses. But he was far from maintaining, as you do, that these books were written by some ignorant and stupid pretender to authorship, many hundred years after the death of Moses. *Hobbes* contends that the books of Moses are so called, not from their having been written by Moses, but from their containing an account of Moses. *Spinoza* supported the same opinion; and *Le Clerc*, a very able theological critic of the last and present century, once entertained the same notion. You see that this fancy has had some patrons before you; the merit or the demerit, the sagacity or the temerity of having asserted, that Moses is not the author of the Pentateuch, is not exclusively yours. *Le Clerc*, indeed, you must not boast of. When his judgment was matured by age, he was ashamed of what he had written on the subject in his younger years, he made a public recantation of his error, by annexing to his commentary on Genesis, a Latin dissertation—concerning Moses, the author of the Pentateuch, and his design in composing it. If in your future life you should chance to change your opinion on the subject, it will be an honour to your character to emulate the integrity, and to imitate the example of *Le Clerc*. The Bible is not the only book which has undergone the fate of being reprobated as spurious, after it had been received as genuine and authentic for many ages. It has been maintained that the history of *Herodotus* was written in the time of *Constantine*; and that the Classics are forgeries of the thirteenth or fourteenth century. These extravagant reveries amused the world at the time of their publication, and have long since sunk into oblivion.

Before you produce your main objections to the genuineness of the books of Moses, you assert—"that there is no affirmative evidence that Moses is the author of them†."—What! no affirmative evidence! In the eleventh century, *Maimonides* drew up a confession

* P. 4.

† Ibid.

ession of faith for the jews, which all of them at this day admit; it consists of only thirteen articles; and two of them have respect to Moses; one affirming the authenticity, the other the genuineness of his books.—The doctrine and prophecy of Moses is true.—The law that we have was given by Moses.—This is the faith of the jews at present, and has been their faith ever since the destruction of their city and temple; it was their faith in the time when the authors of the New Testament wrote; it was their faith during their captivity in Babylon; in the time of their kings and judges; and no period can be shewn, from the age of Moses to the present hour, in which it was not their faith.—Is this no affirmative evidence? I cannot desire a stronger. *Josephus*, in his book against *Appion*, writes thus—"We have only two and twenty books which are to be believed as of divine authority, and which comprehend the history of all ages; five belong to Moses, which contain the original of man, and the tradition of the succession of generations, down to his death, which takes in a compass of about three thousand years." Do you consider this as no affirmative evidence? Why should I mention *Juvenal* speaking of the volume which Moses had written? Why enumerate a long list of profane authors, all bearing testimony to the fact of *Moses* being the leader and the lawgiver of the jewish nation? and if a law-giver, surely, a writer of the laws. But what says the Bible? In Exodus it says—"Moses wrote all the words of the Lord, and took the book of the covenant, and read in the audience of the people*."—In Deuteronomy it says—"And it came to pass, when Moses had made an end of writing the words of this law in a book, until they were finished, (this surely imports the finishing a laborious work,) that Moses commanded the Levites which bare the ark of the covenant of the Lord, saying, Take this book of the law, and put it in the side of the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, that it may be there for a witness against thee†." This is said in Deuteronomy, which is a kind of repetition or abridgment of the four preceding books; and it is well known that the jews gave the name of the Law to the first five books of the Old Testament. What possible doubt can there be that Moses wrote the books in question? I could accumulate many other passages from the scriptures to this purpose; but if what I have advanced will not convince you that there is affirmative evidence, and of the strongest kind, for Moses's being the author of these books, nothing that I can advance will convince you.

The first argument you produce against Moses being the author of these books is so old, that I do not know its original author; and it is so miserable an one, that I wonder you should adopt it—these books cannot be written by Moses, because they are written in the third person—it is always, The Lord said unto Moses, or Moses said unto the Lord‡. This," you say, "is the style and

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* Ch. xxiv. 4, 7.

† Ch. xxxi. 24—26.

‡ P. 5.

manner that historians use, in speaking of the persons whose lives and actions they are writing." This observation is true, but it does not extend far enough; for this is the style and manner not only of historians writing of other persons, but of eminent men, such as *Xenophon* and *Josephus*, writing of themselves. If General *Washington* should write the history of the American war, and should, from his great modesty, speak of himself in the third person, would you think it reasonable that, two or three thousand years hence, any person should, on that account, contend that the history was not true? *Cæsar* writes of himself in the third person—it is always, *Cæsar* made a speech, or a speech was made to *Cæsar*, *Cæsar* crossed the Rhine, *Cæsar* invaded Britain; but every school-boy knows, that this circumstance cannot be adduced as a serious argument against *Cæsar's* being the author of his own *Commentaries*.

But *Moses*, you urge, cannot be the author of the book of Numbers,—because he says of himself—"that *Moses* was a very meek man, above all the men that were on the face of the earth." If he said this of himself, he was, you say, "a vain and arrogant coxcomb, (such is your phrase!) and unworthy of credit—and if he did not say it, the *books* are without authority*." This your dilemma is perfectly harmless? it has not an horn to hurt the weakest logician. If *Moses* did not write this little verse, if it was inserted by *Samuel*, or any of his countrymen, who knew his character and revered his memory, will it follow that he did not write any other part of the book of Numbers? Or if he did not write any part of the book of Numbers, will it follow that he did not write any of the other books of which he is usually reputed the author? And if he did write this of himself, he was justified by the occasion which extorted from him this commendation. Had this expression been written in a modern style and manner, it would probably have given you no offence†. For who would be so fastidious as to find fault with an illustrious man, who, being calumniated by his nearest relations, as guilty of pride and fond of power, should vindicate his character by saying, My temper was naturally as meek and unassuming as that of any man upon earth? There are occasions, in which a modest man, who speaks truly, may speak proudly of himself, without forfeiting his general character; and there is no occasion, which either more requires, or more excuses this conduct, than when he is repelling the foul and envious aspersions of those who both knew his character and had experienced his kindness: and in that predicament stood *Aaron* and *Miriam*, the accusers of *Moses*.

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* P. 5.

† Mr. P. (when speaking of himself, p. 78,) says, "that the man does not exist that can say I have persecuted him, or any man, or any set of men, in the American revolution, or in the French revolution; or that I have in any case returned evil for evil."

I think it needless to notice your observation upon what you call the dramatic style of Deuteronomy; it is an ill-founded hypothesis. You might as well ask, where the author of Cæsar's Commentaries got the speeches of Cæsar, as where the author of Deuteronomy got the speeches of Moses. But your argument—that Moses was not the author of Deuteronomy, because the reason given in that book for the observance of the sabbath is different from that given in Exodus*, merits a reply.

You need not be told that the very name of this book imports, in Greek, a repetition of a law; and that the Hebrew doctors have called it by a word of the same meaning. In the fifth verse of the first chapter it is said in our Bibles, "Moses began to declare this law;" but the Hebrew words, more properly translated, import that Moses "began, or determined, to explain the law." This is no shift of mine to get over a difficulty; the words are so rendered in most of the ancient versions, and by *Fagius*, *Vetablus*, and *Le Clerc*, men eminently skilled in the Hebrew language. This repetition and explanation of the law, was a wise and benevolent proceeding in Moses; that those who were either not born, or were mere infants, when it was first (forty years before) delivered in Horeb, might have an opportunity of knowing it; especially as Moses their leader was soon to be taken from them, and they were about to be settled in the midst of nations given to idolatry and sunk in vice. Now where is the wonder, that some variations, and some additions, should be made to a law, when a legislator thinks fit to republish it many years after its first promulgation?

As to there being two reasons given for the sabbath's being kept holy,—one, that on that day God rested from the work of creation—the other, that on that day God had given them rest from the servitude of Egypt—I see no contradiction in the accounts. If a man, in writing the history of England, should inform his readers, that the parliament had ordered the fifth of November to be kept holy, because on that day God had delivered the nation from a bloody-intended massacre by gunpowder; and if, in another part of his history, he should assign the deliverance of the nation from popery and arbitrary power, by the arrival of king William, as a reason for its being kept holy; would any one contend, that he was not justified in both these ways of expression, or that we ought from thence to conclude, that he was not the author of them both?

You think—"that law in Deuteronomy inhuman and brutal, which authorizes parents, the father and the mother, to bring their own children to have them stoned to death, for what it is pleased to call stubbornness†."—You are aware, I suppose, that paternal power, amongst the *Romans*, the *Gauls*, the *Persians*, and other nations, was of the most arbitrary kind; that it extended to the taking away the life of the child. I do not know whether the Israelites in the time of Moses exercised this paternal power; it was not

* P. 7.

† Ibid.

not a custom adopted by all nations, but it was by many; and in the infancy of society, before individual families had coalesced into communities, it was probably very general. Now Moses, by this law, which you esteem brutal and inhuman, hindered such an extravagant power from being either introduced or exercised amongst the Israelites. This law is so far from countenancing the arbitrary power of a father over the life of his child, that it takes from him the power of accusing the child before a magistrate—the father and the mother of the child must agree in bringing the child to judgment—and it is not by their united will that the child was to be condemned to death; the elders of the city were to judge whether the accusation was true; and the accusation was to be not merely, as you insinuate, that the child was stubborn, but that he was “stubborn and rebellious, a glutton and a drunkard.” Considered in this light, you must allow the law to have been an humane restriction of a power improper to be lodged with any parent.

Having done with what you call the grammatical evidence that Moses was not the author of the books attributed to him, you come to your historical and chronological evidence; and you begin with Genesis. Your first argument is taken from the single word—Dan—being found in Genesis, when it appears from the book of Judges, that the town of Laish was not called Dan, till above three hundred and thirty years after the death of Moses; therefore the writer of Genesis, you conclude, must have lived after the town of Laish had the name of Dan given to it*. Left this objection should not be obvious enough to a common capacity, you illustrate it in the following manner: “Havre-de-Grace was called Havre-Marat in 1793; should then any dateless writing be found, in after times, with the name of Havre-Marat, it would be certain evidence that such a writing could not have been written till after the year 1793.” This is a wrong conclusion. Suppose some republican should at this day publish a new edition of any old history of France, and instead of Havre-de-Grace should write Havre-Marat; and that, two or three thousand years hence, a man, like yourself, should, on that account, reject the whole history as spurious, would he be justified in so doing? Would it not be reasonable to tell him,—that the name Havre-Marat had been inserted, not by the original author of the history, but by a subsequent editor of it; and to refer him, for a proof of the genuineness of the book, to the testimony of the whole French nation? This supposition so obviously applies to your difficulty, that I cannot but recommend it to your impartial attention. But if this solution does not please you, I desire it may be proved, that the *Dan*, mentioned in Genesis, was the same town as the *Dan*, mentioned in Judges. I desire, further, to have it proved, that the *Dan*, mentioned in Genesis, was the name of a town, and not of a river.

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It is merely said—Abram pursued them, the enemies of Lot, to Dan. Now a river was full as likely as a town to stop a pursuit. *Lot*, we know, was settled in the plain of *Jordan*; and *Jordan*, we know, was composed of the united streams of two rivers, called *For* and *Dan*.

Your next difficulty respects its being said in Genesis—"These are the kings that reigned in *Edom* before there reigned any king over the children of Israel:—this passage could only have been written, you say (and I think you say rightly), after the first king began to reign over Israel; so far from being written by Moses, it could not have been written till the time of Saul at the least*." I admit this inference, but I deny its application. A small addition to a book does not destroy either the genuineness or the authenticity of the whole book. I am not ignorant of the manner in which commentators have answered this objection of Spinoza, without making the concession which I have made; but I have no scruple in admitting, that the passage in question, consisting of nine verses containing the genealogy of some kings of Edom, might have been inserted in the book of Genesis, after the book of Chronicles (which was called in Greek by a name importing that it contained things left out in other books) was written. The learned have shewn, that interpolations have happened to other books; but these insertions by other hands have never been considered as invalidating the authority of those books.

"Take away from Genesis," you say, "the belief that Moses was the author, on which only the strange belief that it is the Word of God has stood, and there remains nothing of Genesis but an anonymous book of stories, fables, traditionary or invented absurdities, or of downright lies†."—What! is it a story then, that the world had a beginning, and that the author of it was God? Is it a story, that our first parents fell from a paradisiacal state—that this earth was destroyed by a deluge—that Noah and his family were preserved in the ark, and that the world has been repopled by his descendants?—Look into a book so common that almost every body has it, and so excellent that no person ought to be without it—Grotius on the truth of the christian religion—and you will there meet with abundant testimony to the truth of all the principal facts recorded in Genesis. The testimony is not that of jews, christians, and priests; it is the testimony of the philosophers, historians, and poets of antiquity. The oldest book in the world is Genesis; and it is remarkable that those books which come nearest to it in age, are those which make, either the most distinct mention, or the most evident allusion to the facts related in Genesis; concerning the formation of the world from a chaotic mass, the primeval innocence and subsequent fall of man, the longevity of mankind in the first ages of the world, the depravity of the antediluvians, and the destruction of the world.—Read the tenth

* P. 10.

† P. 11.

tenth chapter of Genesis.—It may appear to you to contain nothing but an uninteresting narration of the descendants of *Shem*, *Ham*, and *Japheth*: a mere fable, an invented absurdity, a downright lie. No, sir, it is one of the most valuable, and the most venerable records of antiquity. It explains what all profane historians were ignorant of—the origin of nations. Had it told us, as other books do, that one nation had sprung out of the earth they inhabited; another from a cricket or a grasshopper; another from an oak; another from a mushroom; another from a dragon's tooth; then, indeed, it would have merited the appellation you, with so much temerity, bestow upon it. Instead of these absurdities, it gives such an account of the peopling the earth after the deluge, as no other book in the world ever did give; and the truth of which all other books in the world, which contain any thing on the subject, confirm. The last verse of the chapter says—"These are the families of the sons of Noah, after their generations, in their nations: and by these were the nations divided in the earth, after the flood." It would require great learning to trace out, precisely, either the actual situation of all the countries in which these founders of empires settled, or to ascertain the extent of their dominions. This, however, has been done by various authors, to the satisfaction of all competent judges; so much at least to my satisfaction, that had I no other proof of the authenticity of Genesis, I should consider this as sufficient. But, without the aid of learning, any man who can barely read his Bible, and has but heard of such people as the *Affyrians*, the *Elamites*, the *Lydians*, the *Medes*, the *Ionians*, the *Thracians*, will readily acknowledge that they had *Affur*, and *Elam*, and *Lud*, and *Madai*, and *Javan*, and *Tiras*, grandsons of *Noah*, for their respective founders; and knowing this, he will not, I hope, part with his Bible, as a system of fables. I am no enemy to philosophy; but when philosophy would rob me of my Bible, I must say of it, as Cicero said of the twelve tables,—This little book alone exceeds the libraries of all the philosophers in the weight of its authority, and in the extent of its utility.

From the abuse of the Bible, you proceed to that of Moses, and again bring forward the subject of his wars in the land of Canaan*. There are many men who look upon all war (would to God that all men saw it in the same light!) with extreme abhorrence, as afflicting mankind with calamities not necessary, shocking to humanity, and repugnant to reason. But is it repugnant to reason that God should, by an express act of his providence, destroy a wicked nation? I am fond of considering the goodness of God as the leading principle of his conduct towards mankind; of considering his justice as subservient to his mercy. He punishes individuals and nations with the rod of his wrath; but I am persuaded that all his punishments originate in his abhorrence of

of sin; are calculated to lessen its influence; and are proofs of his goodness; inasmuch as it may not be possible for Omnipotence itself to communicate supreme happiness to the human race, whilst they continue servants of sin. The destruction of the Canaanites exhibits to all nations, in all ages, a signal proof of God's displeasure against sin; it has been to others, and it is to ourselves, a benevolent warning. Moses would have been the wretch you represent him, had he acted by his own authority alone: but you may as reasonably attribute cruelty and murder to the judge of the land in condemning criminals to death, as butchery and massacre to Moses in executing the command of God.

The Midianites, through the counsel of Balaam, and by the vicious instrumentality of their women, had seduced a part of the Israelites to idolatry; to the impure worship of their infamous god Baal-peor:—for this offence, twenty-four thousand Israelites had perished in a plague from heaven*, and Moses received a command from God “to smite the Midianites, who had beguiled the people.” An army was equipped, and sent against Midian. When the army returned victorious, Moses and the princes of the congregation went out to meet it; “and Moses was wroth with the officers.” He observed the women captives, and he asked with astonishment, “Have ye saved all the women alive? Behold, these caused the children of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to commit trespass against the Lord in the matter of Peor, and there was a plague among the congregation.” He then gave an order that the boys and the women should be put to death, but that the young maidens should be kept alive for themselves. I see nothing in this proceeding, but good policy, combined with mercy. The young men might have become dangerous avengers of, what they would esteem, their country's wrongs; the mothers might have again allured the Israelites to the love of licentious pleasures and the practice of idolatry, and brought another plague upon the congregation; but the young maidens, not being polluted by the flagitious habits of their mothers, nor likely to create disturbance by rebellion, were kept alive. You give a different turn to the matter; you say—“that thirty-two thousand women children were consigned to debauchery by the order of Moses.”—For this assertion there is no foundation either in fact or probability: it is purely an addition of your own, and indicates that you thought it necessary to exaggerate, in order to produce the effect upon your readers which you desired. The women-children were not reserved for the purposes of debauchery, but of slavery;—a custom abhorrent from our manners, but every where practised in former times, and still practised in countries where the benignity of the christian religion has not softened the ferocity of human nature. You here admit a part of the account given in the Bible, respecting the expedition against Midian, to be a true account: it is not unreasonable to de-

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* Numb. xxv. 1—9.

fire that you will admit the whole, or shew sufficient reason why you admit one part, and reject the other. I will mention the part to which you have paid no attention. The Israelitish army consisted but of twelve thousand men, a mere handful when opposed to the people of Midian; yet when the officers made a muster of their troops after their return from the war, they found that they had not lost a single man*! This circumstance struck them as so decisive an evidence of God's interposition, that out of the spoils they had taken they offered "an oblation to the Lord, an atonement for their souls." Do but believe what the captains of thousands, and the captains of hundreds, believed at the time when these things happened, and we shall never more hear of your objections to the Bible, from its account of the wars of Moses.

You produce two or three other objections respecting the genuineness of the five first books of the Bible.—I cannot stop to notice them: every commentator answers them in a manner suited to the apprehension of even a mere English reader. You calculate, to the thousandth part of an inch, the length of the iron bed of *Og* the king of Basan; but you do not prove that the bed was too big for the body, or that a Patagonian would have been lost in it. You make no allowance for the size of a royal bed; nor ever suspect that king *Og* might have been possessed with the same kind of vanity, which occupied the mind of king Alexander, when he ordered his soldiers to enlarge the size of their beds, that they might give to the Indians, in succeeding ages, a great idea of the prodigious stature of a Macedonian. In many parts of your work you speak much in commendation of science. I join with you in every commendation you can give it: but you speak of it in such a manner as gives room to believe, that you are a great proficient in it; if this be the case, I would recommend a problem to your attention, viz.—To determine the height to which a human body, preserving its similarity of figure, may be augmented, before it will perish by its own weight.—When you have solved this problem, we shall know whether the bed of the king of Basan was too big for a giant; whether the existence of a man twelve or fifteen feet high is in the nature of things impossible. My philosophy teaches me to doubt of many things; but it does not teach me to reject every testimony which is opposite to my experience: had I been born in Shetland, I could, on proper testimony, have believed in the existence of the Lincolnshire ox, or of the largest dray-horse in London; though the oxen and horses in Shetland had not been bigger than mastiffs.

Having finished your objections to the genuineness of the books of Moses, you proceed to your remarks on the book of Joshua; and from its internal evidence you endeavour to prove, that this book was not written by Joshua.—What then? what is your conclusion?—"that it is anonymous and without authority†."—Stop a little; your conclusion is not connected with your premises; your friend

* Numb. xxxi. 49.

† P. 14.

friend Euclid would have been ashamed of it. "Anonymous, and therefore without authority!" I have noticed this solecism before; but as you frequently bring it forward, and, indeed, your book stands much in need of it, I will submit to your consideration another observation on the subject.—Domesday book is anonymous, and was written above seven hundred years ago; yet our courts of law do not hold it to be without authority, as to the matters of fact related in it. Yes, you will say, but this book has been preserved with singular care amongst the records of the nation. And who told you that the jews had no records, or that they did not preserve them with singular care? Josephus says the contrary: and, in the Bible itself, an appeal is made to many books, which have perished; such as the book of Jasher, the book of Nathan, of Abijah, of Iddo, of Jehu, of natural history by Solomon, of the acts of Manasseh, and others which might be mentioned. The books of the Old Testament were composed from the records of the jewish nation, and they have been received as true by that nation, from the time in which they were written to the present day.

If I am right in this reasoning, (and I protest to you that I do not see any error in it,) all the arguments you adduce in proof that the book of Joshua was not written by Joshua, nor that of Samuel by Samuel, are nothing to the purpose for which you have brought them forward: these books may be books of authority, though all you advance against the genuineness of them should be granted. The chronological and historical difficulties, which others before you have produced, have been answered, and as to the greatest part of them, so well answered, that I will not waste the reader's time by entering into a particular examination of them.

You make yourself merry with what you call the tale of the sun standing still upon mount Gibeon, and the moon in the valley of Ajalon; and you say that "the story detects itself, because there is not a nation in the world that knows any thing about it*." How can you expect that there should, when there is not a nation in the world whose annals reach this æra by many hundred years†? You would have been contented to admit the account of this miracle as a fine piece of poetical imagery; you may have seen some jewish doctors, and some christian commentators, who consider it as such;

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* P 16.

† It happens, however, that Mr. P. is probably mistaken as to the fact: a confused tradition concerning this miracle, and a similar one in the time of Ahaz, when the sun went back ten degrees, has been preserved amongst one of the most ancient nations, as we are informed by one of the most ancient historians. Herodotus, in his *Euterpe*, speaking of the Egyptian priests, says—"They told me that the sun had four times deviated from his course, having twice risen where he uniformly goes down, and twice gone down where he uniformly rises. This however had produced no alteration in the climate of Egypt; the fruits of the earth and the phenomena of the Nile had always been the same." (Beloe's Transl.) The last part of this observation confirms the conjecture, that this account of the Egyptian priests had a reference to the two miracles respecting the sun mentioned in scripture; for they were not of that kind, which could introduce any change in climates or seasons.

but improperly, in my opinion. I think it idle, at least, if not impious, to undertake to explain how the miracle was performed; but one who is not able to explain the mode of doing a thing, argues ill if he thence infers that the thing was not done. We are perfectly ignorant how the sun was formed, how the planets were projected at the creation, how they are still retained in their orbits by the power of gravity; but we admit, notwithstanding, that the sun was formed, that the planets were then projected, and that they are still retained in their orbits. The machine of the universe is in the hand of God; he can stop the motion of any part, or of the whole of it, with less trouble and less danger of injuring it, than you can stop your watch. In testimony of the reality of the miracle, the author of the book says—"Is not this written in the book of Jasher?"—No author in his senses would have appealed, in proof of his veracity, to a book which did not exist, or in attestation of a fact which, though it did exist, was not recorded in it; we may safely therefore conclude, that, at the time the book of Joshua was written, there was such a book as the book of Jasher, and that the miracle of the sun's standing still was recorded in that book. But this observation, you will say, does not prove the fact of the sun's having stood still; I have not produced it as a proof of that fact; but it proves that the author of the book of Joshua believed the fact, and that the people of Israel admitted the authority of the book of Jasher. An appeal to a fabulous book would have been as senseless an insult upon their understanding, as it would have been upon our's, had Rapin appealed to the Arabian Nights' Entertainment, as a proof of the battle of Hastings.

I cannot attribute much weight to your argument against the genuineness of the book of Joshua, from its being said that—"Joshua burned Ai, and made it an heap for ever, even a desolation unto *this day*.*" Joshua lived twenty-four years after the burning of Ai; and if he wrote his history in the latter part of his life, what absurdity is there in saying, Ai is still in ruins, or Ai is in ruins to this very day? Moses, in his old age, had made use of a similar expression, when he put the Israelites in mind of what the Lord had done to the Egyptians in the red sea, "The Lord hath destroyed them unto this day†."

In the last chapter of the book of Joshua it is related, that Joshua assembled all the tribes of Israel to Shechem; and there, in the presence of the elders and principal men of Israel, he recapitulated, in a short speech, all that God had done for their nation, from the calling of Abraham to that time, when they were settled in the land which God had promised to their forefathers. In finishing his speech, he said to them—"Choose you this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served, that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land

* P. 16.

† Deut. xi. 14.

land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. And the people answered and said, God forbid that we should forsake the Lord, to serve other gods." Joshua urged farther, that God would not suffer them to worship other gods in fellowship with him; they answered, that "they would serve the Lord." Joshua then said to them, "Ye are witnesses against yourselves that ye have chosen the Lord to serve him. And they said, We are witnesses." Here was a solemn covenant between Joshua, on the part of the Lord, and all the men of Israel, on their own part.—The text then says—"So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and set them a statute and an ordinance in Shechem, and Joshua wrote these words in the book of the Law of God." Here is a proof of two things—first, that there was then, a few years after the death of Moses, existing a book called The Book of the Law of God; the same, without doubt, which Moses had written, and committed to the custody of the Levites, that it might be kept in the ark of the covenant of the Lord, that it might be a witness against them—secondly, that Joshua wrote a part at least of his own transactions in that very book, as an addition to it. It is not a proof that he wrote all his own transactions in any book; but I submit entirely to the judgment of every candid man, whether this proof of his having recorded a very material transaction, does not make it probable that he recorded other material transactions; that he wrote the chief part of the book of Joshua; and that such things as happened after his death, have been inserted in it by others, in order to render the history more complete.

I think it unnecessary to make any observation on what you say relative to the book of Judges; but I cannot pass unnoticed your censure of the book of Ruth, which you call "an idle bungling story, foolishly told, no body knows by whom, about a strolling country girl creeping sily to bed to her cousin Boaz*." You do an injury to the character of Ruth. She was not a strolling country girl. She had been married ten years; and being left a widow without children, she accompanied her mother-in-law, returning into her native country, out of which with her husband and her two sons she had been driven by a famine. The disturbances in France have driven many men with their families to America; if, ten years hence, a woman, having lost her husband and her children, should return to France with a daughter-in-law, would you be justified in calling the daughter-in-law a strolling country girl? But she "crept sily to bed to her cousin Boaz."—I do not find so in the history—as a person imploring protection, she laid herself down at the foot of an aged kinsman's bed and she rose up with as much innocence as she had laid herself down. She was afterwards married to Boaz, and reputed by all her neighbours a virtuous woman; and they were more likely to know her character than

than you are. Whoever reads the book of Ruth, bearing in mind the simplicity of ancient manners, will find it an interesting story of a poor young woman, following in a strange land the advice, and affectionately attaching herself to the fortunes of the mother of her deceased husband.

The two books of Samuel come next under your review. You proceed to shew that these books were not written by Samuel, that they are anonymous, and thence you conclude without authority*. I need not here repeat what I have said upon the fallacy of your conclusion; and as to your proving that the books were not written by Samuel, you might have spared yourself some trouble if you had recollected, that it is generally admitted, that Samuel did not write any part of the second book which bears his name, and only a part of the first. It would, indeed, have been an inquiry not undeserving your notice, in many parts of your work, to have examined what was the opinion of learned men respecting the authors of the several books of the Bible; you would have found, that you were in many places fighting a phantom of your own raising, and proving what was generally admitted. You may ascribe the two books of Kings, and the two books of Chronicles, to what authors you please; I am satisfied with knowing that the annals of the Jewish nation were written in the time of Samuel, and, probably, in all succeeding times, by men of ability, who lived in or near the times of which they write. Of the truth of this observation we have abundant proof, not only from the testimony of Josephus, and of the writers of the Talmuds, but from the Old Testament itself. I will content myself with citing a few places—"Now the acts of David the king, first and last, behold they are written in the book of Samuel the seer, and in the book of Nathan the prophet, and in the book of Gad the seer†."—"Now the rest of the acts of Solomon, first and last, are they not written in the book of Nathan the prophet, and in the prophecy of Ahijah the Shilonite, and in the visions of Iddo the seer‡?"—"Now the acts of Rehoboam, first and last, are they not written in the book of Shemaiah the prophet, and of Iddo the seer, concerning genealogies||?"—"Now the rest of the acts of Jehoshaphat, first and last, behold they are written in the book of Jehu the son of Hanani§." Is it possible for writers to give a stronger evidence of their veracity, than by referring their readers to the books from which they had extracted the materials of their history?

"The two books of Kings," you say, "are little more than an history of assassinations, treachery, and war**." That the kings of Israel and Judah were many of them very wicked persons, is evident from the history which is given of them in the Bible; but it ought to be remembered, that their wickedness is not to be attributed to their religion; nor were the people of Israel chosen

* P. 18.

† 1 Chron. xxix. 29.

‡ 2 Chron ix. 29.

|| 2 Chron. xii. 15.

§ 2 Chron. xx. 34.

** P. 21.

chosen to be the people of God, on account of their wickedness; nor was their being chosen, a cause of it. One may wonder, indeed, that, having experienced so many singular marks of God's goodness towards their nation, they did not at once become, and continue to be, (what, however, they have long been,) strenuous advocates for the worship of one only God, the maker of heaven and earth. This was the purpose for which they were chosen, and this purpose has been accomplished. For above three and twenty hundred years the jews have uniformly witnessed to all the nations of the earth the unity of God, and his abomination of idolatry.

Several things you observe are mentioned in the book of the Kings, such as the drying up of Jeroboam's hand, the ascent of Elijah into heaven, the destruction of the children who mocked Elifha, and the resurrection of a dead man*:—these circumstances being mentioned in the book of Kings, and not mentioned in that of Chronicles, is a proof to you that they are lies. I esteem it a very erroneous mode of reasoning, which, from the silence of one author concerning a particular circumstance, infers the want of veracity in another who mentions it. And this observation is still more cogent, when applied to a book which is only a supplement to, or an abridgment of, other books: and under this description the book of Chronicles has been considered by all writers. But though you will not believe the miracle of the drying up of Jeroboam's hand, what can you say to the prophecy which was then delivered concerning the future destruction of the idolatrous altar of Jeroboam? The prophecy is thus written,—“Behold, a child shall be born unto the house of David, Josiah by name, and upon thee, (the altar) shall he offer the priests of the high places†.”—Here is a clear prophecy; the name, family, and office of a particular person are described in the year 975 (according to the Bible chronology) before Christ. Above 350 years after the delivery of the prophecy, you will find, by consulting the second book of Kings‡, this prophecy fulfilled in all its parts.

You make a calculation that Genesis was not written till 860 years after Moses, and that it is of the same age, and you may probably think of the same authority, as Æsop's Fables||. You give, what you call the evidence of this, the air of a demonstration,—“It has but two stages:—first, the account of the kings of Edom, mentioned in Genesis, is taken from Chronicles, and therefore the book of Genesis was written after the book of Chronicles:—secondly, the book of Chronicles was not begun to be written till after Zedekiah, in whose time Nebuchadnezzar conquered Jerusalem, 588 years before Christ, and more than 860 after Moses.”—Having answered this objection before, I might be excused taking any more notice of it; but as you build much, in this place, upon the strength of your argument, I will shew you its weakness, when it is properly stated.—A few verses in the book of Genesis could not be written

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* P. 22, 23.

† 1 Kings xiii. 2.

‡ Chap. xxiii. 15, 16.

|| P. 25.

by Moses; *therefore no part* of Genesis could be written by Moses:—a child would deny your *therefore*.—Again, a few verses in the book of Genesis could not be written by *Moses*, because they speak of kings of Israel, there having been no kings of Israel in the time of Moses; and *therefore* they could not be written by *Samuel*, or by *Solomon*, or by any other person who lived after there were kings in Israel, except by the author of the book of Chronicles:—this is also an illegitimate inference from your position.—Again, a few verses in the book of Genesis are, word for word, the same as a few verses in the book of Chronicles; *therefore* the author of the book of Genesis must have taken them from Chronicles:—another lame conclusion! Why might not the author of the book of Chronicles have taken them from Genesis, as he has taken many other genealogies, supposing them to have been inserted in Genesis by Samuel? But where, you may ask, could Samuel, or any other person, have found the account of the kings of Edom? Probably, in the public records of the nation, which were certainly as open for inspection to Samuel, and the other prophets, as they were to the author of Chronicles. I hold it needless to employ more time on the subject.

At length you come to two books, Ezra and Nehemiah, which you allow to be genuine books, giving an account of the return of the jews from the Babylonian captivity, about 536 years before Christ; but then you say, “Those accounts are nothing to us, nor to any other persons, unless it be to the jews, as a part of the history of their nation; and there is just as much of the Word of God in those books, as there is in any of the histories of France, or in Rapin’s History of England*.” Here let us stop a moment, and try if from your own concessions it be not possible to confute your argument. Ezra and Nehemiah, you grant, are genuine books—“but they are nothing to us!” The very first verse of Ezra says—the prophecy of Jeremiah was fulfilled: is it nothing to us to know that Jeremiah was a true prophet? Do but grant that the Supreme Being communicated to any of the sons of men a knowledge of future events, so that their predictions were plainly verified, and you will find little difficulty in admitting the truth of revealed religion. Is it nothing to us to know that, five hundred and thirty-six years before Christ, the books of Chronicles, Kings, Judges, Joshua, Deuteronomy, Numbers, Leviticus, Exodus, Genesis, every book the authority of which you have attacked, are all referred to by Ezra and Nehemiah, as authentic books, containing the history of the Israelitish nation from Abraham to that very time?—Is it nothing to us to know that the history of the jews is true?—It is every thing to us; for if that history be not true, christianity must be false. The jews are the root, we are branches “grafted in amongst them;” to them pertain the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law,
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and the service of God, and the promises; whose are the fathers, and of whom, as concerning the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen."

You ridicule, in a note, the story of an angel appearing to Joshua*. Your mirth you will perceive to be misplaced, when you consider the design of this appearance; it was to assure Joshua, that the same God who had appeared to Moses, ordering him to pull off his shoes, because he stood on holy ground, had now appeared to himself. Was this no encouragement to a man who was about to engage in war with many nations? Had it no tendency to confirm his faith? Was it no lesson to him to obey, in all things, the commands of God; and to give the glory of his conquests to the author of them, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? As to your wit about pulling off the shoe, it originates, I think, in your ignorance; you ought to have known, that this rite was an indication of reverence for the divine presence; and that the custom of entering barefoot into their temples subsists, in some countries, unto this day.

You allow the book of Ezra to be a genuine book: but that the author of it may not escape without a blow, you say, that in matters of record it is not to be depended on†; and as a proof of your assertion, you tell us, that the total amount of the numbers who returned from Babylon does not correspond with the particulars; and that every child may have an argument for its infidelity, you display the particulars, and shew your own skill in arithmetic, by summing them up. And can you suppose that Ezra, a man of great learning, knew so little of science, so little of the lowest branch of science, that he could not give his readers the sum total of sixty particular sums? You know, undoubtedly, that the Hebrew letters denoted also numbers: and that there was a great similarity between some of these letters. Now what have we to do with numerical contradictions in the Bible, but to attribute them, wherever they occur, to this obvious source of error—the inattention of the transcriber, in writing one letter for another that was like it?

I should extend this book to a length troublesome to the reader, if I answered minutely every objection you have made, and rectified every error into which you have fallen; it may be sufficient briefly to notice some of the chief. The character represented in Job under the name of Satan is, you say, "the first and the only time this name is mentioned in the Bible‡." Now I find this name, as denoting an enemy, frequently occurring in the Old Testament; thus, "What have I to do with you, ye sons of Zeruah, that ye should this day be adversaries unto me||?" In the original it is satans unto me. Again, "The Lord my God hath given me rest on every side, so that there is neither adversary, nor evil occurrent§"—in the original, neither satan nor evil. I need

* P. 27.

† P. 28.

‡ P. 29.

§ 2 Sam. xix. 22.

¶ 1 Kings v. 4.

need not mention other places; these are sufficient to shew, that the word *satan* denoting an adversary, does occur in various places of the Old Testament; and it is extremely probable to me, that the root *satan* was introduced into the Hebrew and other eastern languages, to denote an adversary, from its having been the proper name of the great enemy of mankind. I know it is an opinion of Voltaire, that the word *satan* is not older than the Babylonian captivity: this is a mistake, for it is met with in the hundred and ninth psalm, which all allow to have been written by David, long before the captivity.

The jews, you tell us, "never prayed but when they were in trouble." I do not believe this of the jews; but that they prayed more fervently when they were in trouble than at other times, may be true of the jews, and I apprehend is true of all nations and all individuals.—But "the jews never prayed for any thing but victory, vengeance, and riches*."—Read Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the temple, and blush for your assertion, illiberal and uncharitable in the extreme†!

It appears, you observe, "to have been the custom of the heathens to personify both virtue and vice, by statues and images, as is done now-a-days both by statuary and by painting; but it does not follow from this that they worshipped them any more than we do‡." Not worshipped them! What think you of the golden image which Nebuchadnezzar set up? Was it not worshipped by the princes, the rulers, the judges, the people, the nations, and the languages of the Babylonian empire? Not worshipped them! What think you of the decree of the Roman senate for fetching the statue of the mother of the gods from Pessinum? Was it only that they might admire it as a piece of workmanship? Not worshipped them! "What man is there that knoweth not how that the city of the Ephesians was a worshipper of the great goddess Diana, and of the image which fell down from Jupiter§?" Not worshipped them—The worship was universal. "Every nation made gods of their own, and put them in the houses of the high places which the Samaritans had made—the men of Babylon made Succoth-benoth, and the men of Cuth made Nergal, and the men of Hamath made Ashima, and the Avites made Nibhaz and Tartak, and the Sepharvites burned their children in fire to Adrammelech, and Anammelech, the gods of Sepharvaim¶. The heathens are much indebted to you for this your curious apology for

* P. 30. Note.

† Mr. P. speaking of Agur's prayer, (p. 30) acknowledges that it is a "sensible, well-conceived, and well-expressed prayer." Let us admire his consistency. In the former part of the Age of Reason, (p. 21) *prayer* is ridiculed as "an attempt to make the Almighty change his mind," and a man of prayer is ridiculed as "a beggar" and "a mumper," whose "prayers are reproaches," and his "humility ingratitude." Now we find, even in the bible, a "sensible, well-conceived, and well-expressed prayer:" so then it is a *sensible* thing to *reproach* our Maker, and attempt to make him change his mind!

‡ P. 31.

§ Acts xix. 35.

¶ 2 Kings xvii.

for their idolatry; for a mode of worship the most cruel, senseless, impure, abominable, that can possibly disgrace the faculties of the human mind. Had this your conceit occurred in ancient times, it might have saved *Micah's teraphims*, the *golden Calves of Jeroboam*, and of *Aaron*, and quite superseded the necessity of the second commandment!!!

It is an error, you say, to call the Psalms—the Psalms of David*.—This error was observed many hundred years before you were born.—You, I suppose, will not deny, that David wrote some of them. Songs are of various sorts; we have hunting songs, drinking songs, fighting songs, love songs, foolish, wanton, wicked songs:—if you will have the “Psalms of David to be nothing but a collection from different song-writers,” you must allow that the writers of them were inspired by no ordinary spirit; that it is a collection, incapable of being degraded by the name you give it; that it greatly excels every other collection in matter and in manner. Compare the book of Psalms with the odes of Horace or Anacreon, with the hymns of Callimachus; the golden verses of Pythagoras, the choruses of the Greek tragedians, (no contemptible compositions any of these,) and you will quickly see how greatly it surpasses them all, in piety of sentiment, in sublimity of expression, in purity of morality, and in rational theology.

As you esteem the Psalms of David a song book; it is consistent enough in you to esteem the Proverbs of Solomon a jest book; there have not come down to us above eight hundred of his jests; if we had the whole three thousand, which he wrote, our mirth would be extreme. Let us open the book, and see what kind of jests it contains; take the very first as a specimen—“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; but fools despise wisdom and instruction.”—Do you perceive any jest in this? The fear of the Lord! What Lord does Solomon mean? He means that Lord who took the posterity of Abraham to be his peculiar people—who redeemed that people from Egyptian bondage by a miraculous interposition of his power—who gave the law to Moses—who commanded the Israelites to exterminate the nations of Canaan.—Now this Lord you will not fear; the jest says, you despise wisdom and instruction.—Let us try again—“My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother.”—If your heart has ever been touched by parental feelings, you will see no jest in this.—Once more—“My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not.”—These are the three first proverbs in Solomon's jest book; if you read it through, it may not make you merry; I hope it will make you wise; that it will teach you, at least, the beginning of wisdom—the fear of that Lord whom Solomon feared. Solomon, you tell us, was witty; jesters are sometimes witty; but though all the world, from the time of the queen of Sheba, has heard of the wisdom of Solomon, his wit was never heard of be-

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fore. There is a great difference, Mr. Locke teaches us, between wit and judgment, and there is a greater between wit and wisdom. As to the sins and debaucheries of Solomon, we have nothing to do with them but to avoid them; and to give full credit to his experience, when he preaches to us his admirable sermon on the vanity of every thing but piety and virtue.

Isaiah has a greater share of your abuse than any other writer in the Old Testament, and the reason of it is obvious—the prophecies of Isaiah have received such a full, and circumstantial completion, that, unless you can persuade yourself to consider the whole book (a few historical sketches excepted) “as one continued bombastical rant, full of extravagant metaphor, without application and destitute of meaning*,” you must of necessity allow its divine authority. You compare the burden of Babylon, the burden of Moab, the burden of Damascus, and the other denunciations of the prophet against cities and kingdoms, to “the story of the knight of the burning mountain, the story of Cinderella†, &c. I may have read these stories, but I remember nothing of the subjects of them; I have read also Isaiah’s burden of Babylon, and I have compared it with the past and present state of Babylon, and the comparison has made such an impression on my mind, that it will never be effaced from my memory. I shall never cease to believe that the Eternal alone, by whom things future are more distinctly known than past or present things are by man, that the eternal God alone could have dictated to the prophet Isaiah the subject of the burden of Babylon.

The latter part of the forty-fourth, and the beginning of the forty-fifth chapter of Isaiah, are, in your opinion, so far from being written by Isaiah, that they could only have been written by some person who lived at least an hundred and fifty years after Isaiah was dead:—these chapters, you go on, “are a compliment to Cyrus, who permitted the jews to return to Jerusalem from the Babylonian captivity above one hundred and fifty years after the death of Isaiah:”—and is it for this, sir, that you accuse others of audacity and ignorance, in imposing, as you call it, this book upon the world as the writing of Isaiah? What shall be said of you, who, either designedly or ignorantly, represent one of the most clear and important prophecies in the Bible, as an historical compliment, written above an hundred and fifty years after the death of the prophet?—We contend, sir, that this is a prophecy and not an history; that God called *Cyrus* by his name; declared that he should conquer Babylon; and described the means by which he should do it, above an hundred years before *Cyrus* was born, and when there was no probability of such an event. *Porphyry* could not resist the evidence of *Daniel’s* prophecies, but by saying, that they were forged after the events predicted had taken place; *Voltaire* could not resist the evidence of the prediction of *Jesus*, concerning

cerning the destruction of Jerusalem, but by saying, that the account was written after Jerusalem had been destroyed; and you, at length, (though, for aught I know, you may have had predecessors in this presumption,) unable to resist the evidence of *Isaiah's* prophecies, contend that they are bombastical rant, without application, though the application is circumstantial; and destitute of meaning, though the meaning is so obvious that it cannot be mistaken; and that one of the most remarkable of them is not a prophecy, but an historical compliment written after the event. That the wonderful absurdity of this hypothesis may be more obvious to you, I beg you to consider that Cyrus was a Persian, had been brought up in the religion of his country, and was probably addicted to the magian superstition of two independent Beings, equal in power but different in principle, one the author of light and of all good, the other the author of darkness and all evil. Now is it probable that a captive jew, meaning to compliment the greatest prince in the world, should be so stupid as to tell the prince that his religion was a lie? "I am the Lord, and there is none else, I form the *light* and create *darkness*, I make peace and create evil, I the Lord do all these things*."

But if you will persevere in believing that the prophecy concerning Cyrus was written after the event, peruse the burden of Babylon; was that also written after the event? Were the Medes *then* stirred up against Babylon? Was Babylon, the glory of the kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldees, *then* overthrown, and become as Sodom and Gomorah? Was it *then* uninhabited? Was it *then* neither fit for the Arabian's tent nor the shepherd's fold? Did the wild beasts of the desert *then* lie there? Did the wild beasts of the islands *then* cry in their desolate houses, and dragons in their pleasant palaces? Were Nebuchadnezzar and Belsazzar, the son and the grandson, *then* cut off? Was Babylon *then* become a possession of the bittern, and pools of water? Was it *then* swept with the besom of destruction, so swept that the world knows not now where to find it?

You explain at some length your notion of the misapplication made by St. Matthew of the the prophecy in *Isaiah*—"Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son." That passage has been handled largely and minutely by almost every commentator, and it is too important to be handled superficially by any one: I am not on the present occasion concerned to explain it. It is quoted by you to prove, and it is the only instance you produce—that *Isaiah* was "a lying prophet and an impostor." Now I maintain, that this very instance proves, that he was a true prophet and no impostor. The history of the prophecy, as delivered in the seventh chapter, is this—Rezin king of Syria, and Pekah king of Israel, made war upon Ahaz king of Judah; not merely, or, perhaps, riot at all, for the sake of plunder or the conquest of territory, but with a declared purpose

* *Isa.* xlv. 7.† *P.* 37.

purpose of making an entire revolution in the government of Judah, of destroying the royal house of David, and of placing another family on the throne. Their purpose is thus expressed—"Let us go up against Judah, and vex it, and let us make a breach therein for us, and set a king in the midst of it, even the son of Tabeal."—Now what did the Lord commission Isaiah to say to Ahaz? Did he commission him to say, the kings shall not vex thee? No.—The kings shall not conquer thee? No.—The kings shall not succeed against thee? No:—he commissioned him to say, "It (the purpose of the two kings) shall not stand, neither shall it come to pass." I demand—Did it stand, did it come to pass? Was any revolution effected? Was the royal house of David dethroned and destroyed? Was Tabeal ever made king of Judah? No. The prophecy was perfectly accomplished. You say, "Instead of these two kings failing in their attempt against Ahaz, they succeeded; Ahaz was defeated and destroyed."—I deny the fact; Ahaz was defeated, but not destroyed; and even the "two hundred thousand women, and sons, and daughters," whom you represent as carried into captivity, were not carried into captivity; they were made captives, but they were not carried into captivity; for the chief men of Samaria, being admonished by a prophet, would not suffer Pekah to bring the captives into the land—"They rose up, and took the captives, and with the spoil clothed all that were naked among them, and arrayed them, and shod them, and gave them to eat and to drink, and anointed them, and carried all the feeble of them upon asses (some humanity, you see, amongst those Israelites, whom you every where represent as barbarous brutes), and brought them to Jericho, the city of palm-trees, to their brethren*."—The kings did fail in their attempt; their attempt was to destroy the house of David, and to make a revolution; but they made no revolution, they did not destroy the house of David, for Ahaz slept with his fathers; and Hezekiah, his son, of the house of David, reigned in his stead.

After what I conceive to be a great misrepresentation of the character and conduct of Jeremiah, you bring forward an objection which Spinoza and others before you had much insisted upon, though it is an objection which neither affects the genuineness, nor the authenticity of the book of Jeremiah. The objection is, that the book of Jeremiah has been put together in a disordered state†. It is acknowledged, that the order of time is not every where observed; but the cause of the confusion is not known. Some attribute it to *Baruch* collecting into one volume all the several prophecies which Jeremiah had written, and neglecting to put them in their proper places:—others think that the several parts of the work were at first properly arranged, but that through accident, or the carelessness of transcribers, they were deranged:—others contend, that there is no confusion; that prophecy differs from history, in not being

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* 2 Chron. xxviii. 15.

† P. 37.

subject to an accurate observance of time and order. But leaving this matter to be settled by critical discussion, let us come to a matter of greater importance—to your charge against Jeremiah for his duplicity, and for his false prediction*. First, as to his duplicity:

Jeremiah, on account of his having boldly predicted the destruction of Jerusalem, had been thrust into a miry dungeon by the princes of Judah who sought his life; there he would have perished, had not one of the eunuchs taken compassion on him, and petitioned king Zedekiah in his favour, saying, "These men (the princes) have done evil in all that they have done to Jeremiah the prophet, (no small testimony this, of the probity of the prophet's character,) whom they have cast into the dungeon, and he is like to die for hunger."—On this representation Jeremiah was taken out of the dungeon by an order from the king, who soon afterwards sent privately for him, and desired him to conceal nothing from him, binding himself, by an oath, that, whatever might be the nature of his prophecy, he would not put him to death, or deliver him into the hands of the princes who sought his life. Jeremiah delivered to him the purpose of God respecting the fate of Jerusalem. The conference being ended, the king, anxious to perform his oath, to preserve the life of the prophet, dismissed him, saying, "Let no man know of these words, and thou shalt not die. But if the princes hear that I have talked with thee, and they come unto thee, and say unto thee, Declare unto us now what thou hast said unto the king, hide it not from us, and we will not put thee to death; also what the king said unto thee: then thou shalt say unto them, I presented my supplication before the king, that he would not cause me to return to Jonathan's house to die there. Then came all the princes unto Jeremiah, and asked him, and he told them according to all these words that the king had commanded."—Thus, you remark, "this man of God, as he is called, could tell a lie, or very strongly prevaricate; for certainly he did not go to Zedekiah to make his supplication, neither did he make it."—It is not said that he told the princes he *went* to make his supplication, but that he *presented* it: now it is said, in the preceding chapter, that he did make the supplication, and it is probable that in this conference he renewed it; but be that as it may, I contend that Jeremiah was not guilty of duplicity, or, in more intelligible terms, that he did not violate any law of nature, or of civil society, in what he did on this occasion. He told the truth, in part, to save his life; and he was under no obligation to tell the whole to men who were certainly his enemies.—Now for the false prediction—I will give the description of it in your own words.

"In the 34th chapter is a prophecy of Jeremiah to Zedekiah, in these words, ver. 2.—'Thus saith the Lord, Behold, I will give this city into the hands of the king of Babylon, and will burn it

* P. 40, 41.

it with fire; and thou shalt not escape out of his hand; but thou shalt surely be taken, and delivered into his hand; and thine eyes shall behold the eyes of the king of Babylon, and he shall speak with thee mouth to mouth, and thou shalt go to Babylon. *Yet bear the word of the Lord, O Zedekiah, king of Judah; thus saith the Lord, Thou shalt not die by the sword, but thou shalt die in peace; and with the burnings of thy fathers, the former kings that were before thee, so shall they burn odours for thee, and will lament thee, saying, Ah, lord! for I have pronounced the word, saith the Lord.*

“Now, instead of Zedekiah beholding the eyes of the king of Babylon, and speaking with him mouth to mouth, and dying in peace, and with the burnings of odours, as at the funeral of his fathers (as Jeremiah had declared the Lord himself had pronounced), the reverse, according to the 52d chapter, was the case; it is there stated, verse 10, ‘That the king of Babylon slew the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes; then he put out the eyes of Zedekiah, and bound him in chains, and carried him to Babylon, and put him in prison till the day of his death.’ What can we say of these prophets, but that they are impostors and liars?” I can say this—that the prophecy you have produced, was fulfilled in all its parts: and what then shall be said of those who call Jeremiah a liar and an impostor? Here then we are fairly at issue—you affirm that the prophecy was not fulfilled, and I affirm that it was fulfilled in all its parts. “I will give this city into the hands of the king of Babylon, and he shall burn it with fire:” so says the prophet; what says the history? “They (the forces of the king of Babylon) burnt the house of God, and brake down the walls of Jerusalem, and burnt all the palaces thereof with fire*.”—Thou shalt not escape out of his hand, but shalt surely be *taken*, and *delivered* into his hand:” so says the prophet; what says the history? “The men of war fled by night, and the king went the way towards the plain, and the army of the Chaldees pursued after the king, and overtook him in the plains of Jericho: and all his army were scattered from him; so they *took* the king, and *brought him to the king of Babylon*, to Riblah†.”—The prophet goes on, “Thine eyes shall behold the eyes of the king of Babylon, and he shall speak with thee mouth to mouth.” No pleasant circumstance this to Zedekiah, who had provoked the king of Babylon by revolting from him! The history says, “The king of Babylon gave judgment upon Zedekiah,” or, as it is more literally rendered from the Hebrew, “*spake judgments with him at Riblah*.”—The prophet concludes this part with, “And thou shalt go to Babylon:” the history says, “The king of Babylon bound him in chains, and carried him to Babylon, and put him in prison till the day of his death‡.”—“Thou shalt not die by the sword.” He did not die by the sword, he did not fall in battle.—“But thou shalt die in peace.” He did die in peace, he neither expired on the rack, nor on the scaffold; was
neither

* 2 Chron. xxxvi. 19.

† 2 Kings xxv. 5.

‡ Jer. lii. 11.

neither strangled nor poisoned; no unusual fate of captive kings: he died peaceably in his bed, though that bed was in a prison.—“And with the burnings of thy fathers shall they burn odours for thee.” I cannot prove from the history that this part of the prophecy was accomplished, nor can you prove that it was not. The probability is, that it was accomplished, and I have two reasons on which I ground this probability.—Daniel, Shadrach, Mefchach, and Abednego, to say nothing of other jews, were men of great authority in the court of the king of Babylon, before and after the commencement of the imprisonment of Zedekiah; and Daniel continued in power till the subversion of the kingdom of Babylon by Cyrus.—Now it seems to me to be very probable, that Daniel, and the other great men of the jews, would both have inclination to request, and influence enough with the king of Babylon to obtain, permission to bury their deceased prince Zedekiah, after the manner of his fathers.—But if there had been no jews at Babylon of consequence enough to make such a request, still it is probable that the king of Babylon would have ordered the jews to bury and lament their departed prince, after the manner of their country.

You profess to have been particular in treating of the books ascribed to Isaiah and Jeremiah*.—Particular! in what? You have particularized two or three passages, which you have endeavoured to represent as objectionable, and which I hope have been shewn, to the reader's satisfaction, to be not justly liable to your censure; and you have passed over all the other parts of these books without notice. Had you been particular in your examination, you would have found cause to admire the probity and the intrepidity of the characters of the authors of them; you would have met with many instances of sublime composition; and, what is of more consequence, with many instances of prophetic veracity:—particularities of these kinds you have wholly overlooked.

You proceed to the rest of the prophets, and you take them collectively, carefully however selecting for your observations such particularities as are best calculated to render, if possible, the prophets odious or ridiculous in the eyes of your readers.—That there were false prophets, witches, necromancers, conjurers, fortune-tellers, among the jews, no person will attempt to deny; no nation, barbarous or civilized, has been without them: but when you would degrade the prophets of the Old Testament to a level with these conjuring, dreaming, strolling gentry—when you would represent them as spending their lives in fortune-telling, casting nativities, predicting riches, fortunate or unfortunate marriages, conjuring for lost goods, &c. I must be allowed to say, that you wholly mistake their office, and misrepresent their character: their office was to convey to the children of Israel the commands, the promises, the threatenings of almighty God; and their character was that of men sustaining, with fortitude, persecution in the discharge of their duty. There were
false

false prophets in abundance amongst the jews; and if you oppose these to the true prophets, and call them both party prophets, you have the liberty of doing so, but you will not thereby confound the distinction between truth and falsehood. False prophets are spoken of with detestation in many parts of scripture, particularly by Jeremiah, who accuses them of prophesying lies in the name of the Lord. You cannot think more contemptibly of these gentry, than they were thought of by the true prophets at the time they lived; but as Jeremiah says on this subject, "what is the chaff to the wheat?" what are the false prophets to the true ones? Every thing good is liable to abuse; but who argues against the use of a thing from the abuse of it? against physicians, because there are pretenders to physic?

Jehoram king of Israel, Jehoshaphat king of Judah, and the king of Edom, going with their armies to make war on the king of Moab, came into a place where there was no water either for their men or their cattle. In this distress they waited upon Elisha, (an high honour for one of your conjurors,) by the advice of Jehoshaphat, who knew that the word of the Lord was with him. The prophet, on seeing Jehoram, an idolatrous prince, who had revolted from the worship of the true God, come to consult him, said to him—"Get thee to the prophets of thy father and the prophets of thy mother."—This you think shews Elisha to have been a party prophet, full of venom and vulgarity*—it shews him to have been a man of great courage, who respected the dignity of his own character, the sacredness of his office as a prophet of God, whose duty it was to reprove the wickedness of kings, as of other men. He ordered them to make the valley where they were full of ditches: this, you say, "every countryman could have told, that the way to get water was to dig for it:"—but this is not a true representation of the case; the ditches were not dug that water might be gotten by digging for it, but that they might hold the water when it should miraculously come, "without wind or rain," from another country; and it did come "from the way of Edom, and the country was filled with water."—As to Elisha's cursing the children who had mocked him, and their destruction in consequence of his imprecation, the whole story must be taken together. The provocation he received is, by some, considered as an insult offered to him, not as a man but as a prophet, and that the persons who offered it were not what we understand by little children, but grown-up youths; the term child being applied in the Hebrew language, to grown-up persons. Be this as it may, the cursing was the act of the prophet; had it been a sin, it would not have been followed by a miraculous destruction of the offenders; for this was the act of God, who best knows who deserve punishment. What effect such a signal judgment had on the idolatrous inhabitants of the land, is no where said; but it is probable it was not without a good effect.

Ezekiel

Ezekiel and Daniel lived during the Babylonian captivity; you allow their writings to be genuine. In this you differ from some of the greatest adversaries of christianity; and in my opinion cut up, by this concession, the very root of your whole performance. It is next to an impossibility for any man, who admits the book of Daniel to be a genuine book, and who examines that book with intelligence and impartiality, to refuse his assent to the truth of christianity.

In order to discredit the authority of the books, you form a strange and prodigious hypothesis concerning Ezekiel and Daniel, for which there is no manner of foundation either in history or probability. You suppose these two men to have had no dreams, no visions, no revelation from God Almighty; but to have pretended to these things; and, under that disguise, to have carried on an enigmatical correspondence relative to the recovery of their country from the Babylonian yoke*. That any man in his senses should frame or adopt such an hypothesis, should have so little regard to his own reputation as an impartial inquirer after truth, so little respect for the understanding of his readers, as to obtrude it on the world, would have appeared an incredible circumstance, had not you made it a fact.

You quote a passage from Ezekiel; in the 29th chapter, ver. 11. speaking of Egypt, it is said—"No foot of man shall pass through it, nor foot of beast shall pass through it, neither shall it be inhabited forty years:"—this, you say, "never came to pass, and consequently it is false." Now that this did come to pass, we have, as Bishop Newton observes, "the testimonies of Megasthenes and Berofus, two heathen historians, who lived about 300 years before Christ; one of whom affirms, expressly, that Nebuchadnezzar conquered the greater part of Africa; and the other affirms it, in effect, in saying, that when Nebuchadnezzar heard of the death of his father, having settled his affairs in Egypt, and committed the captives whom he took in Egypt to the care of some of his friends to bring them after him, he hastened directly to Babylon." And if we had been possessed of no testimony in support of the prophecy, it would have been an hasty conclusion, that the prophecy never came to pass; the history of Egypt, at so remote a period, being no where accurately and circumstantially related. I admit that no period can be pointed out, from the age of Ezekiel to the present, in which there was no foot of man or beast to be seen for forty years in all Egypt; but some think that only a part of Egypt is here spoken of; and surely you do not expect a literal accomplishment of an hyperbolical expression, denoting great desolation; importing that the trade of Egypt, which was carried on then, as at present, by caravans, by the foot of man and beast, should be annihilated. Had you taken the trouble to have looked a little farther into the book from which you have made your quotation, you would have

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* P. 46, 46.

† P. 47.

there seen a prophecy delivered above two thousand years ago, and which has been fulfilling from that time to this—Egypt shall be the basest of the kingdoms, neither shall it exalt itself any more above the nations—there shall be no more a prince of the land of Egypt.” —This you may call a dream, a vision, a lie: I esteem it a wonderful prophecy; for as is the prophecy, so has been the event. Egypt was conquered by the Babylonians; and after the Babylonians by the Persians; and after the Persians it became subject to the Macedonians; and after the Macedonians to the Romans; and after the Romans to the Saracens; and then to the Mamelucs; and is now a province of the Turkish empire*.”

You conclude your objections to the Old Testament in a triumphant style; an angry opponent would say, in a style of extreme arrogance, and sottish self-sufficiency.—“I have gone,” you say, “through the Bible (mistaking here, as in other places, the Old Testament for the Bible) as a man would go through a wood, with an axe on his shoulders, and fell trees; here they lie; and the priests, if they can, may replant them. They may, perhaps, stick them in the ground, but they will never grow.”—And is it possible that you should think so highly of your performance, as to believe, that you have thereby demolished the authority of a book, which Newton himself esteemed the most authentic of all histories; which, by its celestial light, illumines the darkest ages of antiquity; which is the touchstone whereby we are enabled to distinguish between true and fabulous theology, between the God of Israel, holy, just, and good, and the impure rabble of heathen Baalim; which has been thought, by competent judges, to have afforded matter for the laws of Solon, and a foundation for the philosophy of Plato; which has been illustrated by the labour of learning, in all ages and countries; and been admired and venerated for its piety, its sublimity, its veracity, by all who were able to read and understand it? No, sir; you have gone indeed through the wood, with the best intention in the world to cut it down; but you have merely busied yourself in exposing to vulgar contempt a few unsightly shrubs, which good men had wisely concealed from public view; you have entangled yourself in thickets of thorns and briars; you have lost your way on the mountains of Lebanon; the goodly cedar trees whereof, lamenting the madness, and pitying the blindness of your rage against them, have scorned the blunt edge and the base temper of your axe, and laughed unhurt at the feebleness of your stroke.

In plain language, you have gone through the Old Testament hunting after difficulties, and you have found some real ones; these you

* In the former part of “the Age of Reason,” Mr. P. contents himself with ridiculing the story of Jonah; but finding that not sufficient to discredit the history, he now (p. 47) turns it into an allegory, a fable, a satire, or something else written by a Gentile, to ridicule the Jewish prophets, and translated into Hebrew—A likely tale truly, that the Jews should so highly esteem a fable, written in contempt and burlesque of their own prophets, as not only to translate, but to incorporate it into their sacred canon!

you have endeavoured to magnify into insurmountable objections to the authority of the whole book. When it is considered that the Old Testament is composed of several books, written by different authors, and at different periods, from Moses to Malachi, comprising an abstracted history of a particular nation for above a thousand years, I think the real difficulties, which occur in it are much fewer, and of much less importance, than could reasonably have been expected. Apparent difficulties you have represented as real ones, without hinting at the manner in which they have been explained. You have ridiculed things held most sacred, and calumniated characters esteemed most venerable; you have excited the scoffs of the profane; increased the scepticism of the doubtful; and perplexed the minds of honest men who wish to worship the God of their fathers in sincerity and truth.—This and more you have done in going through the Old Testament; but you have not so much as glanced at the great design of the whole, at the harmony and mutual dependence of the several parts. You have said nothing of the wisdom of God in selecting a particular people from the rest of mankind, not for their own sakes, but that they might witness to the whole world, in successive ages, his existence and attributes; that they might be an instrument of subverting idolatry, of declaring the name of the God of Israel throughout the whole earth. It was through this nation that the Egyptians saw the wonders of God; that the Canaanites (whom wickedness had made a reproach to human nature) felt his judgments; that the Babylonians issued their decrees—"That none should dare to speak amiss of the God of Israel—that all should fear and tremble before him:"—and it is through them that you and I, and all the world, are not at this day worshippers of idols. You have said nothing of the goodness of God in promising, that, through the seed of Abraham, all the nations of the earth were to be blessed; that the desire of all nations, the blessing of Abraham to the gentiles, should come. You have passed by all the prophecies respecting the coming of the Messiah; though they absolutely fixed the time of his coming, and of his being cut off; described his office, character, condition, sufferings, and death, in so circumstantial a manner, that we cannot but be astonished at the accuracy of their completion in the person of Jesus of Nazareth,

"The New Testament, they tell us, is founded upon the prophecies of the Old; if so, it must follow the fate of its foundation*."—Thus you open your attack upon the New Testament; and I agree with you, that the New Testament must follow the fate of the Old; and that fate is to remain unimpaired by such efforts as you have made against it.

You condescend to think it probable, that there were such persons as Mary, Joseph, and Jesus; and, without troubling yourself about

about their existence or non-existence, assuming, as it were, for the sake of argument, but without positively granting, their existence, you proceed to inform us, "that it is the fable of Jesus Christ, as told in the New Testament, and the wild and visionary doctrine raised thereon," against which you contend*. You will not repute it a fable, that there was such a man as Jesus Christ; that he lived in Judea near eighteen hundred years ago, that he went about doing good, and preaching, not only in the villages of Galilee, but in the city of Jerusalem; that he had several followers who constantly attended him; that he was put to death by Pontius Pilate; that his disciples were numerous a few years after his death, not only in Judea, but in Rome the capital of the world, and in every province of the Roman empire; that a particular day has been observed in a religious manner by all his followers, in commemoration of a real or supposed resurrection; and that the constant celebration of baptism, and of the Lord's supper, may be traced back from the present time to him, as the author of those institutions. These things constitute, I suppose, no part of your fable; and if these things be facts, they will, when maturely considered, draw after them so many other things related in the New Testament concerning Jesus, that there will be left for your fable but very scanty materials, which will require great fertility of invention before you will dress them up into any form which will not disgust even a superficial observer.

The miraculous conception you esteem a fable, and in your mind it is an obscene fable.—Impure indeed must that man's imagination be, who can discover any obscenity in the angel's declaration to Mary—The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee; therefore that Holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.—I wonder you do not find obscenity in Genesis, where it is said, "The Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters," and brought order out of confusion, a world out of a chaos, by his fostering influence. As to the christian faith being built upon the heathen mythology, there is no ground whatever for the assertion; there would have been some for saying, that much of the heathen mythology was built upon the events recorded in the Old Testament.

-You come now to a demonstration, or, which amounts to the same thing, to a proposition which cannot, you say, be controverted:—first, "That the *agreement* of all the parts of a story does not prove that story to be true, because the parts may agree and the whole may be false;—secondly, That the *disagreement* of the parts of a story proves that the *whole cannot be true*. The agreement does not prove truth, but the disagreement proves falsehood positively†." Great use, I perceive, is to be made of this proposition. You will pardon my unskilfulness in dialectics, if I presume to controvert the

the truth of this abstract proposition, as applied to any purpose in life. The agreement of the parts of a story implies that the story has been told by, at least, two persons. Now I think it scarcely possible for even two persons, and the difficulty is increased if there are more than two, to write the history of the life of any one of their acquaintance, without there being a considerable difference between them, with respect to the number and order of the incidents of his life. Some things will be omitted by one, and mentioned by the other; some things will be briefly touched by one, and the same things will be circumstantially detailed by the other; the same things, which are mentioned in the same way by them both, may not be mentioned as having happened exactly at the same point of time, with other possible and probable differences. But these real or apparent difficulties, in minute circumstances, will not invalidate their testimony as to the material transactions of his life, much less will they render the whole of it a fable. If several independent witnesses, of fair character, should agree in all the parts of a story, (in testifying, for instance, that a murder or a robbery was committed at a particular time, in a particular place, and by a certain individual,) every court of justice in the world would admit the fact, notwithstanding the abstract possibility of the whole being false. When you speak of the whole of a story, you cannot mean every particular circumstance connected with the story, but not essential to it; you must mean the pith and marrow of the story; for it would be impossible to establish the truth of any fact, if a disagreement in the evidence of witnesses, in minute points, should be considered as annihilating the weight of their evidence in points of importance. In a word, the relation of a fact differs essentially from the demonstration of a theorem. If one step is left out, one link in the chain of ideas constituting a demonstration is omitted, the conclusion will be destroyed; but a fact may be established, notwithstanding a disagreement of the witnesses in certain trifling particulars of their evidence respecting it.

As to the genealogies of Christ given by Matthew and Luke, it is evident at first sight, that they are of two families, those of Mary the real mother of Jesus, and Joseph the reputed father of Jesus; it is therefore no wonder that they differ. I hold it sufficient to say, that the authors had no design to deceive the reader, that they took their accounts from the public registers, which were carefully kept, and that had they been fabricators of these genealogies, they would have been exposed at the time to instant detection; and the certainty of that detection would have prevented them from making the attempt to impose a false genealogy on the Jewish nation.

You insist much upon some things being mentioned by one evangelist, which are not mentioned by all or by any of the others; and you take this to be a reason why we should consider the gospels, not as the works of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, but

as the productions of some *unconnected* individuals, each of whom made his own legend*. I do not admit the truth of this supposition; but I may be allowed to use it as an argument against yourself—it removes every possible suspicion of fraud and imposture, and confirms the gospel history in the strongest manner. Four *unconnected* individuals have each written memoirs of the life of Jesus; from whatever source they derived their materials, it is evident that they agree in a great many particulars of the last importance; such as the purity of his manners; the sanctity of his doctrines; the multitude and publicity of his miracles; the persecuting spirit of his enemies; the manner of his death; and the certainty of his resurrection; and whilst they agree in these great points, their disagreement in points of little consequence, is rather a confirmation of the truth, than an indication of the falsehood, of their several accounts.—Had they agreed in nothing, their testimony ought to have been rejected as a legendary tale; had they agreed in every thing, it might have been suspected that, instead of unconnected individuals, they were a set of impostors. The manner, in which the evangelists have recorded the particulars of the life of Jesus, is wholly conformable to what we experience in other biographers, and claims our highest assent to its truth; notwithstanding the force of your incontrovertible proposition.

As an instance of contradiction between the evangelists, you tell us, that Matthew says, the angel announcing the immaculate conception appeared unto Joseph; but Luke says, he appeared unto Mary†.—The angel, sir, appeared to them both; to Mary, when he informed her that she should, by the power of God, conceive a son; to Joseph some months afterwards, when Mary's pregnancy was visible; in the interim she had paid a visit of three months to her cousin Elizabeth.

Who, you ask, would now believe a girl, who should say she was gotten with child by a ghost?—Who, but yourself, would ever have asked a question so abominably indecent and profane? I cannot argue with you on this subject.—You will never persuade the world, that the Holy Spirit of God has any resemblance to the stage ghosts in Hamlet or Macbeth, from which you seem to have derived your idea of it.

The story of the massacre of the young children by the order of Herod, is mentioned only by Matthew; and therefore you think it is a lie. We must give up all history if we refuse to admit facts recorded by only one historian. Matthew addressed his gospel to the jews, and put them in mind of a circumstance, of which they must have had a melancholy remembrance; but gentile converts were less interested in that event. The evangelists were not writing the life of Herod, but of Jesus; it is no wonder that they omitted, above half a century after the death of Herod, an instance of his cruelty, which was not essentially connected with their subject,

* P. 54.

† P. 55.

ject. The massacre, however, was probably known even at Rome ; and it was certainly correspondent to the character of Herod. John, you say, at the time of the massacre, “ was under two years of age ; and yet he escaped ; so that the story circumstantially belies itself.”—John was six months older than Jesus ; and you cannot prove that he was not beyond the age to which the order of Herod extended ; it probably reached no farther than to those who had completed their first year, without including those who had entered upon their second : but without insisting upon this, still I contend that you cannot prove John to have been under two years of age at the time of the massacre. Nor is it certain that John was, at that time, in that part of the country to which the edict of Herod extended. But there would be no end of answering, at length, all your little objections.

No two of the evangelists, you observe, agree in reciting, *exactly in the same words*, the written inscription which was put over Christ when he was crucified *.—I admit that there is an unessential verbal difference ; and are you certain that there was not a verbal difference in the inscriptions themselves ?—One was written in Hebrew, another in Greek, another in Latin ; and, though they had all the same meaning, yet it is propable, that if two men had translated the Hebrew and the Latin into Greek, there would have been a verbal difference between their translations. “ The only one,” you tell us, “ of the men called apostles, who appears to have been near the spot where Jesus was crucified, was Peter†.”—This your assertion is not true—we do not know that Peter was present at the crucifixion ; but we do know that John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, was present ; for Jesus spoke to him from the cross.—You go on, “ But why should we believe Peter, convicted by their own account of perjury, in swearing that he knew not Jesus ?” I will tell you why—because Peter sincerely repented of the wickedness into which he had been betrayed, through fear for his life, and suffered martyrdom in attestation of the truth of the christian religion.

But the evangelists disagree, you say, not only as to the superscription on the cross, but as to the time of the crucifixion, “ Mark saying it was at the third hour (nine in the morning), and John at the sixth hour (twelve, as you suppose, at noon).” There is a solution of this difficulty, in which many judicious men have acquiesced—That John, writing his gospel in Asia, used the Roman method of computing time ; which was the same as our own ; so that by the sixth hour, when Jesus was *condemned*, we are to understand six o’clock in the morning ; the intermediate time from six to nine, when he was crucified, being employed in preparing for the crucifixion. But if this difficulty should be still esteemed insuperable, it does not follow that it will always remain so ; and if it should, the main point, the crucifixion of Jesus, will not be affected thereby.

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* P. 55.

† P. 56.

I cannot, in this place, omit remarking some circumstances attending the crucifixion, which are so natural, that we might have wondered if they had not occurred. Of all the disciples of Jesus, John was beloved by him with a peculiar degree of affection; and, as kindness produces kindness, there can be little doubt that the regard was reciprocal. Now whom should we expect to be the attendants of Jesus in his last suffering? Whom but John, the friend of his heart?—Whom but his mother, whose soul was now pierced through by the sword of sorrow, which *Simeon* had foretold?—Whom but those, who had been attached to him through life; who, having been healed by him of their infirmities, were impelled by gratitude to minister to him of their substance, to be attentive to all his wants?—These were the persons whom we should have expected to attend his execution; and these were there. To whom would an expiring son, of the best affections, recommend a poor, and, probably, a widowed mother, but to his warmest friend?—And this did Jesus.—Unmindful of the extremity of his own torture, and anxious to alleviate the burden of her sorrows, and to protect her old age from future want and misery, he said to his beloved disciple—"Behold thy mother! and from that hour that disciple took her to his own home." I own to you, that such instances as these, of the conformity of events to our probable expectation, are to me genuine marks of the simplicity and truth of the gospels; and far outweigh a thousand little objections, arising from our ignorance of manners, times, and circumstances, or from our incapacity to comprehend the means used by the Supreme Being in the moral government of his creatures.

St. Matthew mentions several miracles which attended our Saviour's crucifixion—the darkness which overspread the land—the rending of the veil of the temple—an earthquake which rent the rocks—and the resurrection of many saints, and their going into the holy city.—"Such," you say, "is the account which this dashing writer of the book of Matthew gives, but in which he is not supported by the writers of the other books*." This is not accurately expressed; Matthew is supported by Mark and Luke, with respect to two of the miracles—the darkness—and the rending of the veil;—and their omission of the others does not prove, that they were either ignorant of them, or disbelieved them. These two miracles were better calculated to produce general conviction, amongst the persons for whose benefit Mark and Luke wrote their gospels, than either the earthquake or the resurrection of the saints. The earthquake was, probably, confined to a particular spot, and might, by an objector, have been called a natural phenomenon; and those to whom the saints appeared might, at the time of writing the gospels of Mark and Luke, have been dead: but the darkness must have been generally known and remembered; and the veil of the temple might still be preserved at the time these authors wrote.—

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As to John not mentioning any of these miracles—it is well known that his gospel was written as a kind of supplement to the other gospels; he has therefore omitted many things which the other three evangelists had related, and he has added several things which they had not mentioned; in particular, he has added a circumstance of great importance; he tells us that he saw one of the soldiers pierce the side of Jesus with a spear, and that blood and water flowed through the wound; and lest any one should doubt of the fact, from its not being mentioned by the other evangelists, he asserts it with peculiar earnestness—"And he that saw it, bare record, and his record is true: and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe."—John saw blood and water flowing from the wound; the blood is easily accounted for; but whence came the water? The anatomists tell us—that it came from the *pericardium*:—so consistent is evangelical testimony with the most curious researches into natural science!—You amuse yourself with the account of what the scripture calls *many* saints, and you call an *army* of saints, and are angry with Matthew for not having told you a great many things about them.—It is very possible that Matthew might have known the fact of their resurrection, without knowing every thing about them; but if he had gratified your curiosity in every particular, I am of opinion that you would not have believed a word of what he had told you. I have no curiosity on the subject; it is enough for me to know that "Christ was the first fruits of them that slept," and "that all that are in the graves shall hear his voice and shall come forth," as those holy men did, who heard the voice of the Son of God at his resurrection, and passed from death to life.

As the resurrection of Jesus is a point which you attack with all your force, I will examine minutely the principal of your objections; I do not think them deserving of this notice, but they shall have it. The book of Matthew, you say, "states that when Christ was put in the sepulchre, the jews applied to Pilate for a watch, or a guard to be placed over the sepulchre, to prevent the body being stolen by the disciples*."—I admit this account, but it is not the whole of the account: you have omitted the reason for the request which the chief priests made to Pilate—"Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while he was yet alive, after three days I will rise again."—It is material to remark this; for at the very time that Jesus predicted his resurrection, he predicted also his crucifixion, and all that he should suffer from the malice of those very men who now applied to Pilate for a guard†.—These men knew full well that the first part of this prediction had been accurately fulfilled through their malignity; and, instead of repenting of what they had done, they were so infatuated as to suppose, that by a guard of soldiers they could prevent the completion of the second.—The other books, you observe, "say nothing about this

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* P. 58.

† Matt. xvi. 21.

application, nor about the sealing of the stone, nor the guard, nor the watch, and according to these accounts there were none."—
—This, sir, I deny. The other books do not say that there were none of these things; how often must I repeat, that omissions are not contradictions, nor silence concerning a fact a denial of it?

You go on—"The book of Matthew continues its account that at the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn, towards the first day of the week, came *Mary Magdalene* and the other *Mary* to see the sepulchre. Mark says it was sun-rising, and John says it was dark. Luke says it was *Mary Magdalene*, and Joanna, and *Mary the Mother of James*, and *other women*, that came to the sepulchre. And John says that *Mary Magdalene* came alone. So well do they agree about their first evidence! they all appear, however, to have known most about *Mary Magdalene*; she was a woman of a large acquaintance, and it was not an ill conjecture that she might be upon the stroll*."—This is a long paragraph; I will answer it distinctly:—first, there is no disagreement of evidence with respect to the time when the women went to the sepulchre: all the evangelists agree as to the day on which they went; and, as to the time of the day, it was early in the morning; what court of justice in the world would set aside this evidence, as insufficient to substantiate the fact of the women's having gone to the sepulchre, because the witnesses differed as to the degree of twilight which lighted them on their way? Secondly, there is no disagreement of evidence with respect to the persons who went to the sepulchre. John states that *Mary Magdalene* went to the sepulchre; but he does not state, *as you make him state*, that *Mary Magdalene* went alone; she might, for any thing you have proved, or can prove, to the contrary, have been accompanied by all the women mentioned by Luke. Thirdly, in opposition to your insinuation that *Mary Magdalene* was a common woman, I wish it to be considered, whether there is any scriptural authority for that imputation; and whether there be or not, I must contend, that a repentant and reformed woman, ought not to be esteemed an improper witness of a fact. The conjecture which you adopt concerning her, is nothing less than an illiberal, indecent, unfounded calumny.

The book of Matthew, you observe, goes on to say—"And behold there was an earthquake, for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and *sat upon it*:"—but the other books say nothing about any earthquake;"—what then? does their silence prove that there was none?"—"nor about the angel rolling back the stone and sitting upon it;"—what then? does their silence prove that the stone was not rolled back by an angel, and that he did not sit upon it?"—"and according to their accounts there was no angel sitting there." This conclusion I must deny; their accounts do not say there was no angel

angel sitting there, at the time that Matthew says he sat upon the stone. They do not deny the fact, they simply omit the mention of it; and they all take notice that the women, when they arrived at the sepulchre, found the stone rolled away: hence it is evident that the stone was rolled away *before* the women arrived at the sepulchre; and the other evangelists, giving an account of what happened to the women *when* they reached the sepulchre, have merely omitted giving an account of a transaction previous to their arrival. Where is the contradiction? What space of time intervened between the rolling away the stone, and the arrival of the women at the sepulchre, is no where mentioned; but it certainly was long enough for the angel to have changed his position; from sitting on the outside he might have entered into the sepulchre; and another angel might have made his appearance, or, from the first, there might have been two, one on the outside rolling away the stone, and the other within. Luke, you tell us, "says there were two, and they were both standing; and John says there were two, and both sitting."—It is impossible, I grant, even for an angel to be sitting and standing at the same instant of time; but Luke and John do not speak of the same instant, nor of the same appearance—Luke speaks of the appearance to all the women; and John of the appearance to Mary Magdalene alone, who tarried weeping at the sepulchre after Peter and John had left it.

As to your inference, from Matthew's using the expression *unto this day*, "that the book must have been manufactured after a lapse of some generations at least*," it cannot be admitted against the positive testimony of all antiquity. That the story about stealing away the body was a bungling story, I readily admit; but the chief priests are answerable for it: it is a strong instance to you, to me, and to every body, how far prejudice may mislead the understanding.

You come to that part of the evidence in those books that respects, you say, "the pretended appearances of Christ after his pretended resurrection; the writer of the book of Matthew relates, that the angel that was sitting on the stone at the mouth of the sepulchre, said to the two Marys, (chap. xxviii. 7.) "Behold, Christ is gone before you into Galilee, there ye shall see him†." Turn, sir, to this passage in your Bible, and you will find that the angel did not say, Behold, Christ *is gone* before you into Galilee,"—but, "Behold, *he goeth* before you into Galilee." I know not what Bible you made use of in this quotation, none that I have seen render the original word by—he is gone: it might be properly rendered, he will go; and it is literally rendered, he is going. This phrase does not imply an immediate setting out for Galilee: when a man has fixed upon a long journey to London or Bath, it is common enough to say, he is going to London or Bath, though the time of his going may be at some distance. Even your dashing Matthew could not be guilty of such a blunder as to make the an-
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gel say, *he is gone*; for he tells us immediately afterwards, that, as the women were departing from the sepulchre to tell his disciples what the angels had said to them, Jesus himself met them. Now how Jesus could be *gone* into Galilee, and yet meet the women at Jerusalem, I leave you to explain, for the blunder is not chargeable upon Matthew. I excuse your introducing the expression—"then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee," for the quotation is rightly made; but had you turned to the Greek Testament, you would not have found in this place any word answering to *then*; the passage is better translated—and the eleven. Christ had said to his disciples, "After I am risen again, I will go before you into Galilee*:"—and the angel put the women in mind of the very expression and prediction—*he is risen, as he said; and behold, he goeth before you into Galilee*. Matthew, intent upon the appearance in Galilee, of which there were, probably, at the time he wrote, many living witnesses in Judea, omits the mention of many appearances taken notice of by John, and by this omission, seems to connect the day of the resurrection of Jesus, with that of the departure of the disciples for Galilee. You seem to think this a great difficulty and incapable of solution; for you say—"It is not possible, unless we admit these disciples the right of wilful lying, that the writers of these books could be any of the eleven persons called disciples; for if, according to Matthew, the eleven went into Galilee to meet Jesus in a mountain, by his own appointment, on the same day that he is said to have risen, Luke and John must have been two of that eleven; yet the writer of Luke says expressly, and John implies as much, that the meeting was that same day in a house at Jerusalem; and on the other hand, if, according to Luke and John, the *eleven* were assembled in a house at Jerusalem, Matthew must have been one of that eleven; yet Matthew says, the meeting was in a mountain in Galilee, and consequently the evidence given in those books destroys each other†." A false position must end in an absurd conclusion. I have shewn your position—that the eleven went into Galilee on the day of the resurrection—to be false, and hence your consequence—that the evidence given in these two books destroys each other—is not to be admitted. You ought, moreover, to have considered, that the feast of unleavened bread, which immediately followed the day on which the passover was eaten, lasted seven days; and that strict observers of the law did not think themselves at liberty to leave Jerusalem, till that feast was ended; and this is a collateral proof that the disciples did not go to Galilee on the day of the resurrection.

You certainly have read the New Testament, but not, I think, with great attention, or you would have known who the apostles were. In this place you reckon *Luke* as one of the eleven, and in other places you speak of him as an eye-witness of the things he relates; you ought to have known that Luke was no apostle; and he

* Matt. xxvi. 32.

† P. 60, 61.

he tells you himself, in the preface to his gospel, that he wrote from the testimony of others. If this mistake proceeds from your ignorance, you are not a fit person to write comments on the Bible ; if from design, you are still less fit ; in either case it may suggest to your readers the propriety of suspecting the truth and accuracy of your assertions, however daring and intemperate.

You think Paul an improper witness of the resurrection ; I think him one of the fittest that could have been chosen ; and for this reason—his testimony is the testimony of a former enemy. He had, in his own miraculous conversion, sufficient ground for changing his opinion as to a matter of fact ; for believing that to have been a fact, which he had formerly, through extreme prejudice, considered as a fable. For the truth of the resurrection of Jesus he appeals to above two hundred and fifty living witnesses ; and before whom does he make this appeal ?—Before his enemies, who were able and willing to blast his character, if he had advanced an untruth. They neither proved, nor attempted to prove any such thing ; and, therefore, we may safely conclude, that this testimony of Paul to the resurrection of Jesus was true ; and it is a testimony, in my opinion, of the greatest weight.

You come, you say, to the last scene, the ascension, upon which, in your opinion, “ the reality of the future mission of the disciples was to rest for proof*.”—I do not agree with you in this. The reality of the future mission of the apostles might have been proved, though Jesus Christ had not visibly ascended into heaven. Miracles are the proper proofs of a divine mission ; and when Jesus gave the apostles a commission to preach the gospel, he commanded them to stay at Jerusalem, till they “ were endued with power from on high.” Matthew has omitted the mention of the ascension ; and John, you say, has not said a syllable about it. I think otherwise. John has not given an express account of the ascension, but has certainly said something about it ; for he informs us, that Jesus said to Mary—“ Touch me not ; for I am not yet *ascended* to my father : but go to my brethren, and say unto them, *I ascend* unto my father and your father, and to my God and your God.” This is surely saying something about the ascension ; and if the fact of the ascension be not related by John or Matthew, it may reasonably be supposed, that the omission was made, on account of the notoriety of the fact. That the fact was generally known, may be justly collected from the reference which Peter makes to it in the hearing of all the jews, a very few days after it had happened—“ This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. Therefore being *by the right hand of God* exalted.—Paul bears testimony also to the ascension, when he says, that Jesus was *received up into glory*. As to the difference you contend for, between the account of the ascension as given by Mark and Luke, it does not exist ; except in this, that Mark omits the particulars of Jesus go-

ing

ing with his apostles to Bethany, and blessing them there, which are mentioned by Luke. But omissions, I must often put you in mind, are not contradictions.

You have now, you say, "gone through the examination of the four books ascribed to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John; and when it is considered that the whole space of time, from the crucifixion to what is called the ascension, is but a few days, apparently not more than three or four, and that all the circumstances are reported to have happened near the same spot, Jerusalem, it is, I believe, impossible to find, in any story upon record, so many, and such glaring absurdities, contradictions, and falsehoods, as are in those books*."—What am I to say to this? Am I to say, that in writing this paragraph, you have forfeited your character as an honest man? Or, admitting your honesty, am I to say that you are grossly ignorant of the subject? Let the reader judge.—John says, that Jesus appeared to his disciples at Jerusalem on the day of his resurrection, and that Thomas was not then with them.—The same John says, that after *eight days*, he appeared to them again, when Thomas was with them.—Now, sir, how *apparently three or four days* can be consistent with *really eight days*, I leave you to make out. But this is not the whole of John's testimony, either with respect to *place or time*—for he says—After these things (after the two appearances to the disciples at Jerusalem on the first and on the eighth day after the resurrection) Jesus shewed himself again to his disciples at the sea of *Tiberias*. The sea of Tiberias, I presume you know, was in Galilee; and Galilee, you may know, was sixty or seventy miles from Jerusalem; it must have taken the disciples some time, after the eighth day, to travel from Jerusalem into Galilee. What, in your own insulting language, have you to answer, as to the *same spot, Jerusalem*, as to your *apparently three or four days*?—But this is not all. Luke, in the beginning of the Acts, refers to his gospel, and says—"Christ shewed himself alive after his passion, by many infallible proofs, being seen of the apostles forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God:—instead of *four*, you perceive there were *forty* days between the crucifixion and the ascension. I need not, I trust, after this, trouble myself about the falsehoods and contradictions which you impute to the evangelists; your readers cannot but be upon their guard, as to the credit due to your assertions, however bold and improper. You will suffer me to remark, that the evangelists were plain men; who, convinced of the truth of their narration, and conscious of their own integrity, have related what they knew with admirable simplicity. They seem to have said to the Jews of their time, and to say to the Jews and unbelievers of all times—We have told you the truth; and if you will not believe us, we have nothing more to say.—Had they been impostors, they would have written with more caution and art, have obviated every cavil, and

and avoided every appearance of contradiction. This they have not done; and this I consider as a proof of their honesty and veracity.

You are the first unbeliever who ever swore that he was an infidel; concluding your deistical creed with—So help me God*! I pray that God may help you; that he may, through the influence of his holy spirit, bring you to a right mind; convert you to the religion of his Son, whom, out of his abundant love to mankind, he sent into the world, that all who believe in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

You swear, that you think the christian religion is not true. I give full credit to your oath; it is an oath in confirmation—of what?—of an opinion.—It proves the sincerity of your declaration of your opinion; but the opinion, notwithstanding the oath, may be either true or false. Permit me to produce to you an oath not confirming an opinion, but a fact; it is the oath of St. Paul, when he swears to the Galatians, that, in what he told them of his miraculous conversion, he did not tell a lie: “Now the things which I write unto you, behold, before God, I lie not:”—do but give that credit to Paul which I give to you, do but consider the difference between an opinion and a fact, and I shall not despair of your becoming a christian.

Deism, you say, consists in a belief of one God, and an imitation of his moral character, or the practice of what is called virtue; and in this (as far as religion is concerned) you rest all your hopes.—There is nothing in deism but what is in christianity, but there is much in christianity which is not in deism. The christian has no doubt concerning a future state; every deist, from Plato to Thomas Paine, is on this subject overwhelmed with doubts insuperable by human reason. The christian has no misgivings as to the pardon of penitent sinners, through the intercession of a mediator; the deist is harrassed with apprehension lest the moral justice of God should demand, with inexorable rigour, punishment for transgression. The christian has no doubt concerning the lawfulness and the efficacy of prayer; the deist is disturbed on this point by abstract considerations concerning the goodness of God, which waits not to be intreated; concerning his foresight, which has no need of our information; concerning his immutability, which cannot be changed through our supplication. The christian admits the providence of God, and the liberty of human actions; the deist is involved in great difficulties, when he undertakes the proof of either. The christian has assurance that the Spirit of God will help his infirmities; the deist does not deny the possibility that God may have access to the human mind, but he has no ground to believe the fact of his either enlightening the understanding, influencing the will, or purifying the heart.

“Those

"Those," you say, "who are not much acquainted with ecclesiastical history, may suppose that the book called the New Testament has existed ever since the time of Jesus Christ; but the fact is historically otherwise; there was no such book as the New Testament till more than three hundred years after the time that Christ is said to have lived*."—This paragraph is calculated to mislead common readers; it is necessary to unfold its meaning. The book, called the New Testament, consists of twenty-seven different parts; concerning seven of these, viz. the Epistle to the Hebrews, that of James, the second of Peter, the second of John, the third of John, that of Jude, and the Revelation, there were at first some doubts; and the question, whether they should be received into the canon, might be decided, as all questions concerning opinions must be, by vote. With respect to the other twenty parts, those who are most acquainted with ecclesiastical history will tell you, as Du Pin does after Eusebius, that they were owned as canonical, at all times, and by all christians. Whether the council of Laodicea was held before or after that of Nice, is not a settled point; all the books of the New Testament, except the Revelation, are enumerated as canonical in the Constitutions of that council; but it is a great mistake to suppose, that the greatest part of the books of the New Testament were not in *general use* amongst christians, long before the council of Laodicea was held.

Did you ever read the apology for the christians, which Justin Martyr presented to the emperor Antoninus Pius, to the senate, and people of Rome? In this apology, which was presented not fifty years after the death of St. John, not only parts of *all the four gospels are quoted*, but it is expressly said, that on the day called Sunday, a portion of them was read in the public assemblies of the christians. I forbear pursuing this matter farther; else it might easily be shewn, that probably the gospels, and certainly some of St. Paul's epistles, were known to *Clement, Ignatius, and Polycarp*, contemporaries with the apostles. These men could not quote or refer to books which did not exist: and, therefore, though you could make it out that the book called the New Testament did not formally exist under that title, till 350 years after Christ; yet I hold it to be a certain fact, that all the books of which it is composed, were written, and most of them received by all christians, within a few years after his death.

You raise a difficulty relative to the time which intervened between the death and resurrection of Jesus, who had said, that the Son of man shall be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth†.—Are you ignorant then that the jews used the phrase three days and three nights to denote what we understand by three days?—It is said in Genesis, "The rain was upon the earth forty days and forty nights‡;" and this is equivalent to the expression, "And the flood was forty days upon the earth||." Instead then of saying three

* P. 65.

† P. 69.

‡ Chap. vii. 12.

|| Ver. 17.

three days and three nights, let us simply say—three days—and you will not object to Christ's being three days—Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, in the heart of the earth, I do not say that he was in the grave the whole of either Friday or Sunday; but an hundred instances might be produced, from writers of all nations, in which a part of a day is spoken of as the whole.—Thus much for the defence of the historical part of the New Testament.

You have introduced an account of *Faustus*, as denying the genuineness of the books of the New Testament*. Will you permit that great scholar in sacred literature, *Michaelis*, to tell you something about this *Faustus*?—"He was ignorant, as were most of the African writers, of the Greek language, and acquainted with the New Testament merely through the channel of the Latin translation: he was not only devoid of a sufficient fund of learning, but illiterate in the highest degree. An argument which he brings against the genuineness of the gospel affords sufficient ground for this assertion; for he contends, that the gospel of St. Matthew could not have been written by St. Matthew himself, because he is always mentioned in the third person†."

Not being able to produce any argument to render questionable either the genuineness or the authenticity of St. Paul's Epistles, you tell us, that "it is a matter of no great importance by whom they were written, since the writer, whoever he was, attempts to prove his doctrine by argument: he does not pretend to have been witness to any of the scenes told of the resurrection and ascension, and he declares that he had not believed them‡." That Paul had so far resisted the evidence which the apostles had given of the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, as to be a persecutor of the disciples of Christ, is certain; but I do not remember the place where he declares that he had not believed them. The high priest and the senate of the children of Israel did not deny the reality of the miracles, which had been wrought by Peter and the apostles; they did not contradict their testimony concerning the resurrection and the ascension; but whether they believed it or not, they were fired with indignation, and took counsel to put the apostles to death: and this was also the temper of Paul; whether he believed or did not believe the story of the resurrection, he was exceedingly mad against the saints. The writer of Paul's Epistles does not attempt to prove his doctrine by argument; he in many places tells us, that his doctrine was not taught him by man, or any invention of his own, which required the ingenuity of argument to prove it:—"I certify you, brethren, that the gospel, which was preached of me, is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ§." Paul does not pretend to have been a witness of the story of the resurrection, but he does much more; he asserts, that he was himself a witness of the resurrection.

* P. 67.

† Marsh's Transl.

‡ P. 70.

§ Gal. i. 11, 12.

rection. After enumerating many appearances of Jesus to his disciples, Paul says of himself, "Last of all, he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time*." Whether you will admit Paul to have been a *true* witness or not, you cannot deny that he pretends to have been a witness of the resurrection.

The story of his being struck to the ground, as he was journeying to Damascus, has nothing in it, you say, miraculous or extraordinary: you represent him as struck by lightning†.—It is somewhat extraordinary for a man, who is struck by lightning, to have, at the very time, full possession of his understanding; to hear a voice issuing from the lightning, speaking to him in the Hebrew tongue, calling him by his name, and entering into conversation with him. His companions, you say, appear not to have suffered in the same manner:—the greater the wonder. If it was a common storm of thunder and lightning which struck Paul and all his companions to the ground, it is somewhat extraordinary that he alone should be hurt; and that, notwithstanding his being struck blind by lightning, he should in other respects be so little hurt, as to be immediately able to walk into the city of Damascus. So difficult is it to oppose truth by an hypothesis!

You are displeased with St. Paul "for setting out to prove the resurrection of the *same* body."—You know, I presume, that the resurrection of the *same* body is not, by all, admitted to be a scriptural doctrine.—"In the New Testament (wherein, I think, are contained all the articles of the christian faith) I find our Saviour and the apostles to preach *the resurrection of the dead*, and the *resurrection from the dead*, in many places; but I do not remember any place where the resurrection of the *same* body is so much as mentioned." This observation of Mr. Locke I so far adopt, as to deny that you can produce any place in the writings of St. Paul, wherein he sets out to prove the resurrection of the *same* body. I do not question the possibility of the resurrection of the *same* body, and I am not ignorant of the manner in which some learned men have explained it; (somewhat after the way of your vegetative speck in the kernel of a peach;) but as you are discrediting St. Paul's doctrine, you ought to shew that what you attempt to discredit is the doctrine of the apostle. As to what you say about the consciousness of existence being the only conceivable idea of a future life‡—it proves nothing, either for or against the resurrection of a body, or of the *same* body; it does not inform us, whether to any or to what substance, material or immaterial, this consciousness is annexed. I leave it, however, to others, who do not admit personal identity to consist in consciousness, to dispute with you on this point, and willingly subscribe to the opinion of Mr. Locke, "that nothing but consciousness can unite remote existences into the *same* person."

Paul,

Paul, you say, affects to be a naturalist; and to prove (you might more properly have said illustrate) his system of resurrection from the principles of vegetation—"Thou fool," says he, "that which thou sowest is not quickened except it die:"—to which one might reply, in his own language, and say—"Thou fool, Paul, that which thou sowest is not quickened except it die *not*." It may be seen, I think, from this passage, who affects to be a naturalist, to be acquainted with the microscopical discoveries of modern times; which were probably neither known to Paul, nor to the Corinthians; and which, had they been known to them both, would have been of little use in the illustration of the subject of the resurrection. Paul said—that which thou sowest is not quickened except it die:—every husbandman in Corinth, though unable perhaps to define the term death, would understand the apostle's phrase in a popular sense, and agree with him that a grain of wheat must become *rotten* in the ground before it could sprout; and that, as God raised from a rotten grain of wheat, the roots, the stem, the leaves, the ear of a new plant, he might also cause a new body to spring up from the rotten carcase in the grave.—Though the authority of Jesus may have as little weight with you as that of Paul, yet it may not be improper to quote to you our Saviour's expression, when he foretells the numerous disciples which his death would produce—"Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground, and *die*, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit."—You perceive from this, that the jews thought the death of the grain was necessary to its reproduction—hence every one may see what little reason you had to object to the apostle's popular illustration of the possibility of a resurrection. Had he known as much as any naturalist in Europe does, of the progress of an animal from one state to another, as from a worm to a butterfly, (which you think applies to the case,) I am of opinion he would not have used that illustration in preference to what he has used, which is obvious and satisfactory.

Whether the fourteen epistles ascribed to Paul were written by him or not, is, in your judgment, a matter of indifference.—So far from being a matter of indifference, I consider the genuineness of St. Paul's epistles to be a matter of the greatest importance; for if the epistles, ascribed to Paul, were written by him, (and there is unquestionable proof that they were,) it will be difficult for you, or for any man, upon fair principles of sound reasoning, to deny that the christian religion is true. The argument is a short one, and obvious to every capacity. It stands thus:—St. Paul wrote several letters to those whom, in different countries, he had converted to the christian faith; in these letters he affirms two things;—first, that he had wrought miracles in their presence;—secondly, that many of themselves had received the gift of tongues, and other miraculous gifts of the Holy Ghost.—The persons to whom these letters

were

them addressed must, on reading them, have certainly known, whether Paul affirmed what was true, or told a plain lie: they must have known, whether they had seen him work miracles; they must have been conscious, whether they themselves did or did not possess any miraculous gifts.—Now can you, or can any man, believe, for a moment, that Paul (a man certainly of great abilities) would have written public letters, full of lies, and which could not fail of being discovered to be lies, as soon as his letters were read?—Paul could not be guilty of falsehood in these two points, or in either of them; and if either of them be true, the christian religion is true. References to these two points are frequent in St. Paul's epistles. I will mention only a few. In his Epistle to the Galatians, he says, "This only would I learn of you, received ye the spirit (gifts of the spirit) by the works of the law?—He ministereth to you the spirit, and worketh miracles among you."—To the Thessalonians he says, "Our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost."—To the Corinthians he thus expresses himself: "My preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in the demonstration of the spirit and of power;"—and he adds the reason for his working miracles—"That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God†."—With what alacrity would the faction at Corinth, which opposed the apostle, have laid hold of this and many similar declarations in the letter, had they been able to have detected any falsehood in them! There is no need to multiply words on to clear a point—the genuineness of Paul's Epistles proves their authenticity, independently of every other proof; for it is absurd in the extreme to suppose him, under circumstances of obvious detection, capable of advancing what was not true; and if Paul's Epistles be both genuine and authentic, the christian religion is true.—Think of this argument.

You close your observations in the following manner:—Should the Bible (meaning, as I have before remarked, the Old Testament and Testament hereafter fall, it is not I that have done it||. You look, I think, upon your production with a parent's partial eye, when you speak of it in such a style of self-complacency. The Bible, sir, has withstood the learning of *Porphry*, and the power of *Julian*, to say nothing of the manichean *Fauslus*—it has resisted the genius of *Bolingbroke*, and the wit of *Voltaire*, to say nothing of a numerous herd of inferior assailants—and it will not fall by your force. You have barbed anew the blunted arrows of former adversaries; you have feathered them with blasphemy and ridicule; dipped them in your deadliest poison; aimed them with your utmost skill; shot them against the shield of faith with your utmost vigour; but, like the feeble javelin of aged *Priam*, they will scarcely reach the mark, will fall to the ground without a stroke.

What

† Chap. iii. 2, 5.

† 1 Thess. i. 5.

† 1 Cor. ii. 4.

|| P. 74.

What is it, you ask, the Bible teaches?—The prophet Micah shall answer you: it teaches us—"to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with our God;"—justice, mercy, and piety, instead of what you contend for—rapine, cruelty, and murder. What is it, you demand, the Testament teaches us? You answer your question—to believe that the Almighty committed debauchery with a woman.—Absurd and impious assertion! No, sir, no; this profane doctrine, this miserable stuff, this blasphemous perverting of scripture, is your doctrine, not that of the New Testament. I will tell you the lesson which it teaches to infidels as well as to believers; it is a lesson which philosophy never taught, which wit cannot ridicule, nor sophistry disprove; the lesson is this—"The dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live;—all that are in their graves shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation."

The moral precepts of the gospel are so well fitted to promote the happiness of mankind in this world, and to prepare human nature for the future enjoyment of that blessedness, of which, in our present state we can form no conception, that I had no expectation they would have met with your disapprobation. You say, however,—“As to the scraps of morality that are irregularly and thinly scattered in those books, they make no part of the pretended thing, revealed religion.”—“Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them.”—Is this a scrap of morality? Is it not rather the concentrated essence of all ethics, the vigorous root from which every branch of moral duty towards each other may be derived? Duties, you know, are distinguished by moralists into duties of perfect and imperfect obligation: does the Bible teach you nothing, when it instructs you, that this distinction is done away? when it bids you “put on bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering, forbearing one another and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any? These, and precepts such as these, you will in vain look for in the codes of *Frederic* or *Justinian*; you cannot find them in our statute books; they were not taught, nor are they taught in the schools of heathen philosophy; or, if some one or two of them should chance to be glanced at by a *Plato*, a *Seneca*, or a *Cicero*, they are not bound upon the consciences of mankind by any sanction. It is in the gospel, and the gospel alone, that we learn their importance; acts of benevolence and brotherly love may be to an unbeliever voluntary acts, to a christian they are indispensable duties.—Is a new commandment no part of revealed religion? “A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another:” the law of christian benevolence is enjoined us by Christ himself in the most solemn manner, as the distinguishing badge of our being his disciples.

Two precepts you particularize as inconsistent with the dignity and the nature of man—that of not resenting injuries, and that of loving enemies*.”—Who but yourself ever interpreted literally the proverbial phrase—“If a man smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also?”—Did Jesus himself turn the other cheek when the officer of the high priest smote him? It is evident, that a patient acquiescence under slight personal injuries is here enjoined; and that a proneness to revenge, which instigates men to savage acts of brutality, for every trifling offence, is forbidden. As to loving enemies, it is explained, in another place, to mean, the doing them all the good in our power; “If thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink;” and what think you is more likely to preserve peace, and to promote kind affections amongst men, than the returning good for evil? Christianity does not order us to love in proportion to the injury—it does not “offer a premium for a crime,”—it orders us to let our benevolence extend alike to all, that we may emulate the benignity of God himself, who maketh “his sun to rise on the evil and on the good.”

You are animated with proper sentiments of piety, when you speak of the structure of the universe. No one, indeed, who considers it with attention, can fail of having his mind filled with the supreme veneration for its Author. Who can contemplate, without astonishment, the motion of a comet, running far beyond the orb of Saturn, endeavouring to escape into the pathless regions of unbounded space, yet feeling, at its utmost distance, the attractive influence of the sun, hearing, as it were, the voice of God arresting its progress, and compelling it, after a lapse of ages, to reiterate its ancient course?—Who can comprehend the distance of the stars from the earth, and from each other?—It is so great, that it mocks our conception; our very imagination is terrified, confounded, and lost, when we are told, that a ray of light, which moves at the rate of above ten millions of miles in a minute, will not, though emitted at this instant from the brightest star, reach the earth in less than six years.—We think this earth a great globe; and we see the sad wickedness, which individuals are often guilty of, in scraping together a little of its dirt; we view, with still greater astonishment and horror, the mighty ruin which has, in all ages, been brought upon human-kind, by the low ambition of contending powers, to acquire a temporary possession of a little portion of its surface. But how does the whole of this globe sink, as it were, to nothing, when we consider that a million of earths will scarcely equal the bulk of the sun; that all the stars are suns; and that millions of suns constitute, probably, but a minute portion of that material world, which God hath distributed through the immensity of space!—Systems, however, of insensible matter, though arranged in exquisite order, prove only the wisdom and the power of the great Architect of nature.—As percipient beings, we look for something

something more—for his goodness—and we cannot open our eyes without seeing it.

Every portion of the earth, sea, and air, is full of sensitive beings, capable, in their respective orders, of enjoying the good things which God has prepared for their comfort. All the orders of beings are enabled to propagate their kind; and thus provision is made for a successive continuation of happiness. Individuals yield to the law of dissolution inseparable from the material structure of their bodies: but no gap is thereby left in existence; their place is occupied by other individuals capable of participating in the goodness of the Almighty. Contemplations such as these fill the mind with humility, benevolence, and piety. But why should we stop here? why not contemplate the goodness of God in the redemption, as well as in the creation of the world? By the death of his only-begotten Son Jesus Christ, he hath redeemed the whole human race from the eternal death, which the transgression of Adam had entailed on all his posterity.—You believe nothing about the transgression of Adam. The history of Eve and the serpent excites your contempt; you will not admit that it is either a real history, or an allegorical representation of death entering into the world through sin, through disobedience to the command of God.—Be it so.—You find, however, that death doth reign over all mankind, by whatever mean it was introduced: this is not a matter of belief, but of lamentable knowledge.—The New Testament tells us, that, through the merciful dispensation of God, Christ hath overcome death, and restored man to that immortality which Adam had lost:—this also you refuse to believe.—Why? Because you cannot account for the propriety of this redemption.—Miserable reason! stupid objection! What is there that you can account for? Not for the germination of a blade of grass, not for the fall of a leaf of the forest—and will you refuse to eat of the fruits of the earth, because God has not given you wisdom equal to his own? Will you refuse to lay hold on immortality, because he has not given you, because he, probably, could not give to such a being as man, a full manifestation of the end for which he designs him, nor of the means requisite for the attainment of that end?

From the inert nature of matter—from the faculties of the human mind—from the apparent imperfection of God's moral government of the world—from many modes of analogical reasoning, and from other sources, some of the philosophers of antiquity did collect, and modern philosophers may, perhaps, collect a strong probability of a future existence; and not only of a future existence, but (which is quite a distinct question) of a future state of retribution, proportioned to our moral conduct in this world. Far be it from me to loosen any of the obligations to virtue; but I must confess, that I cannot, from the same sources of argumentation, derive any positive assurance on the subject. Think then with what thankfulness of heart I receive the Word of God, which tells me,